JUNE
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THE ®

saint
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Cloth-of-Gold Murders
by BAYNARD KENDRICK

The Anthropologist at Large
by R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

Death in the Hills
by CRAIG RICE

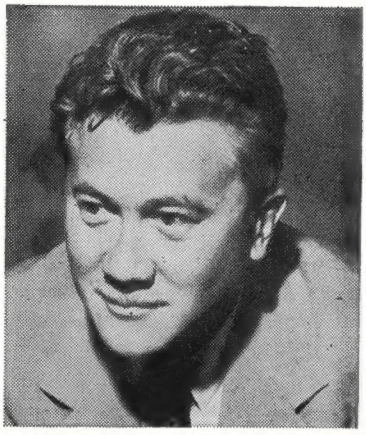
The Picture of Guilt
by LAWRENCE TREAT

The Loaded Tourist
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

I Am Not A Murderer!

A NEW STORY by WENZELL BROWN

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION



Last month's Introduction, in which I discussed the possible origins of the name of Dr Fu Manchu, was all too inevitably bound to spark a renewed barrage of those tired questions about why I named my favorite character Simon Templar, alias The Saint, none of which I intend to answer directly. But I will go so far as to offer a brief historical note for those who would like to develop their own theories.

The Order of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon, whose name was rapidly and necessarily shortened to the Knights Templar, was founded in 1128 by Hugh de Payens for the purpose of protecting pilgrims bound for the Holy Land. Its members took vows of purity, poverty, and humility, swearing to dedicate themselves only to service and crusades. St Bernard of Clairvaux gave the movement his blessing, as did the top political leaders of the day. The Pope granted them special privileges. With almost miraculous speed they became an institution that lasted almost two centuries.

Unfortunately, as happens with many initially noble ideas, practise developed along divergent lines from theory, and the Templars became one more example of that adage about the corruptive effects of power, especially the worldly power which they had originally forsworn. From penniless idealists they developed into wealthy and greedy financiers, from fighting knights they grew into ambitious politicians, and the protection which it had been their first object to provide turned into something more reminiscent of the kind supplied by American racketeers in their heyday.

They became such dangerous rivals of other established Authority that the Inquisition finally took on the task of liquidating them. With its usual efficiency, backed up by its sacred armory of burning, stretching, and bone-crushing devices, it obtained confessions of all kinds of peculation, sacrilege, blasphemy, and unnatural vice, on the strength of which hundreds were executed; the Order was abolished and its possessions confiscated.

How much of this sad story is symbolized in the career of our Simon must be a matter of opinion.

Or, perhaps, remains to be seen . . .

Leslie Charteris

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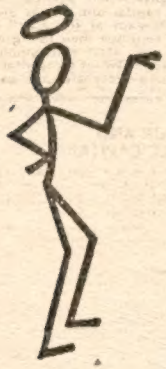

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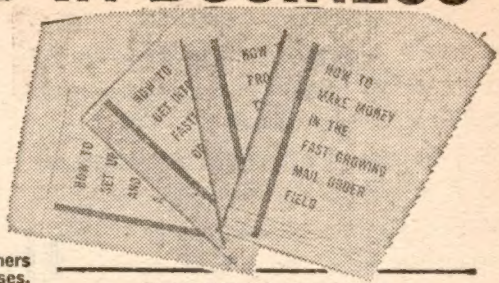
HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS

...OWN A FRANCHISE BUSINESS
...ENTER THE MAIL ORDER FIELD
...PROFIT FROM A SIDELINE BUSINESS
...SET UP A NEW BUSINESS



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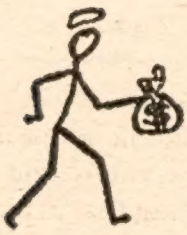
the loaded tourist

by . . . Leslie Charteris



Maybe you can't take it with you, but some people will always try . . .

THE lights of Lucerne were twinkling on the lake as Simon Templar strolled out towards it through the Casino gardens, and above them the craggy head of old Pilatus loomed blackly against a sky full of stars. At a jetty across the Nationalquai a tourist launch was disgorging a load of trippers, and the clear Swiss air was temporarily raucous with the alien accents of Lancashire and London. Simon stood under a tree, enjoying a cigarette and waiting patiently for them to disperse. He had a deep aversion to mobs, and did not want to walk in the middle of one even the short distance to his hotel: something perhaps overly sensitive and fastidious in him recoiled instinctively from their mildly alcoholic exuberance and the laughter that was just a shade too loud and shallow for his tranquil mood. It was not because he was afraid of being recognised. Any one of them would probably have reacted to his name, or at least to his still better-known sobriquet, the Saint; but none would have been likely to identify his face. The features of the mocking buccaneer whose long and simultaneous vendettas with

TO MANY PEOPLE, THE BRIEF-CASE WOULD ONLY HAVE SEEMED TO CONTAIN AN ECCENTRIC ASSORTMENT OF JUNK. BUT NOT TO THE SAINT.

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the underworld and the law had become legendary in his own lifetime were known to few—a fact which the Saint had often found to his advantage.

But at that moment he was not even thinking of the advantages of anonymity. He was simply indulging a personal distaste for boisterous holiday-makers. He was still trying to take a holiday himself. He wanted nothing from them except to be left alone, and they had nothing to fear from him.

Presently they were gone, and the esplanade was deserted again. He dropped his cigarette and stood like a statue, absorbed in the serene beauty of shimmering water and sentinel mountains.

From the direction of the Hotel National, off to his left, came a single set of footsteps. They were solid, purposeful, a little hurried. Simon turned only his head, and saw the man who made them as he came nearer—a stoutish man of middle height, wearing a dark suit and a dark homburg, carrying a bulky brief-case, the whole effect combined with his intent and urgent gait giving him an incongruously brisk and business-like appearance in the peaceful alpine night. Simon caught a glimpse of his face as he passed under one of the street lamps that stood along the water-front: it had a sallow and unmistakably Latin cast that was accentuated by a small pointed black beard.

Then, hardly a moment later, Simon realised that he was not watching one man, but three.

The other two came from somewhere out of the shadows—one tall and gaunt, the other short and powerful. They wore snap-brim hats pulled down over their eyes and kept their hands in their pockets. They, too, moved quickly and purposefully—more quickly even than the man with the beard, so that their distance behind him was dwindling rapidly. But the difference was that their feet made no sound. . . .

It was so much like watching a conventional scene from a movie that for what seemed afterwards like an unforgivable length of time, but was probably no more than a number of seconds, the Saint observed it as passively as if he had been sitting in a theatre. Perhaps it was so obvious and implausible in that setting that his rational mind resisted accepting it at its face value. It was only as the two pursuers closed the last yard between them and the bearded man, and the lamplight flashed on steel in the gaunt one's hand, that Simon Templar understood that his immobility under the tree had let them think that they were unobserved, and that this was all for real. And by then there was no time left to forestall the climax of the act.

The two followers moved like a well co-ordinated team. The gaunt one's right hand snaked over

their quarry's right shoulder and clamped over his mouth; the steel in his left hand disappeared where it touched the bearded man's back. At the same moment, like a horrible extension of the same creature, the stocky one snatched the briefcase out of unprotesting fingers. Then, in the same continuous flow of movement, the bearded man was falling bonelessly, like a rag doll, and the two attackers were running back towards the alley between the Casino gardens and the gardens of the Hotel National.

The tingle of belated comprehension was still crawling up the Saint's spine as he raced to intercept them. He did not call out, for it was too late now to warn the victim, and he saw no one else close enough to be any help. He ran as silently as the two footpads, and faster.

He met them at the corner of the alley. The gaunt one was nearer, and saw him first, and swung to meet him. The Saint saw a cruel bony face twisting in a vicious snarl, but he had the advantage of surprise. Before any of its transparently unfriendly intentions could materialise, his fist slammed into it, and the gaunt man sat down suddenly.

Either the stocky one was overconfident of his partner's ability to cope with the intrusion, or loyalty to a comrade was not in him, for he did not wait to lend his aid. He swerved and kept on running. And because he still carried the briefcase which appeared to be the prize in the affray, Simon ran after him.

The stocky one had an unexpected turn of speed for a man of his build. Reluctantly, because he was not dressed for it, the Saint launched himself in a flying tackle that just reached one of the stocky man's pistoning legs. The man fell lightly, like a wrestler, but Simon kept his grip on one ankle. Then, as they rolled over at the edge of a clump of rhododendrons, the man's other foot thumped into the side of the Saint's head. Coloured lights danced across Simon's eyes, and his hold loosened. He must have been half-stunned for a moment; then as his head cleared, he was holding nothing.

A heavy rustling in the bushes, hoarse shouts, and the sound of more running feet mingled confusedly in his brain as he sat up.

A man bent over him, only dimly visible in the gloom; and the Saint instinctively gathered himself to fight back before he realised that this was a newcomer. The height was about the same as that of the stocky man; but the silhouette, round and roly-poly, was different. The voice that came with it, in excellent English, with a curious mixture of Continental accent and Oxford vowels, was reassuring.

"Are you all right?"

Simon picked himself up, felt his face tenderly, and brushed off his clothes.

"I think so. Did you see my playmate?"

"He ran away. I'm not built for running—or football tackles. What was it about?"

There were more hurrying footsteps, and the beam of a flashlight stabbed at them. In the reflected glow behind it Simon saw the outlines of a uniform.

"Here's someone who's going to be professionally interested in the answer to that," he said grimly.

The policeman spoke in the atrocious guttural dialect of the region. It was well out of the Saint's considerable linguistic range, but he needed no interpreter to translate it as some variant of the standard gambit of law officers in such situations anywhere: "What goes on here?"

The roly-poly man answered in the same patois. His face in the light was round and soft and childish, with rimless glasses over rather prominent blue eyes. He wore a tweed coat and a round, soft pork-pie hat. He talked volubly, with graphic gestures, so that Simon easily understood that he was describing the Saint's encounter with the stocky thug, which he must have witnessed. The policeman asked another question, and the round man handed him a card from a small leather folder.

The policeman turned to the Saint.

"Vous parlez français?"

"Mais oui," said the Saint easily. "This gentleman saw me trying to catch one man. There was another. Over there."

They walked to where Simon had dropped the gaunt man. But there was no one there.

"He seems to have got away, too," he said ruefully. Then he pointed across the promenade. "But there's the man they robbed."

The gaunt man had taken back his knife, but it had done its work well. The man with the little black beard must have died almost instantly. His face was almost shockingly composed and disinterested when they turned him over.

"The brief-case which you say they took from him," said the policeman, in French. "What happened to it?"

Simon shrugged.

"I suppose the fellow I tackled got away with it."

"And so we shall not know the motive for the attack," observed the round man thoughtfully.

"Without wanting to play Sherlock Holmes," said the Saint, with a trace of sarcasm, "I should guess that it might have been robbery."

The policeman was searching the pockets of the body. With a light touch on the arm, the moon-faced man drew the Saint a little aside.

"Restrain yourself, my friend. The police don't like to be teased. May I introduce myself? My name is Oscar Kleinhaus. I'm fairly well known here. I'll try to see that you have no trouble."

"Thank you," said the Saint curiously.

The policeman was holding an Italian passport.

"Filippo Ravenna," he read from it. "Of Venice. Married. Fifty-one years old. Director of companies."

"Was he a friend of yours?" Kleinhaus asked.

"I never saw him before in my life," said the Saint.

The policeman thumbed over the pages of the passport, and pointed at one of them.

"What is this?"

Simon looked over his shoulder.

"It's an immigrant's visa to the United States . . . issued a week ago. Apparently it has not yet been used."

"But you say you did not know him."

"I forget how many thousands of immigrants enter the United States every year," said the Saint; "but I assure you they are not all friends of mine."

Again he felt a warning tug at his sleeve.

The rotund Mr. Kleinhaus addressed the policeman again in his own dialect. He appeared to be arguing that the Saint was merely an innocent bystander who had tried to catch a couple of criminals; that he should not be treated like a suspect; that the policeman would do better to concentrate on the crime. The policeman seemed to be grudgingly impressed. He turned back to the Saint less aggressively.

"Your name, please?"

Simon had grown a little wary lately of the hazards of his reputation. In Switzerland, the traditional land of peace and neutrality, he had decided to make an attempt to reduce those risks when he registered at his hotel.

"Tombs," he said. "Sebastian Tombs."

"Where are you staying here?"

"At the National."

The policeman wrote down the information in a notebook.

For the first time, now, there were more people walking towards them along the quay. It was late, but presently there would be the inevitable crowd.

Kleinhaus said something else to the policeman, and the policeman seemed to agree. Kleinhaus took Simon by the arm and steered him away.

"We'll 'phone the station to send him some help," he said. "We can do it from your hotel. Could you identify those two thugs?"

"After a fashion." Simon described them as best he could, as they walked through the gardens to the back entrance of the hotel. "I suppose the detectives will want to know that, for what it's worth."

"I'll pass it on to them when I telephone." They were in the lobby. "It'll be easier for me, speaking the lingo. And you don't want to get mixed up in it, and spoil your

vacation. I'll take care of everything."

Simon looked at him pensively.

"You're very kind," he said. "Is that just Swiss hospitality?"

"I don't like visitors to have bad experiences in my country," said Mr. Kleinhaus. "Go to bed. Perhaps we shall meet again."

He raised his round hat courteously as Simon entered the elevator.

The Saint never stayed awake to ask himself questions to which he could only give himself imaginary answers. He slept as if nothing had happened, as if there were no loose ends in his mind, secure in the confidence that if the incident of that night was destined to be only a beginning it would reveal the rest of itself in its own good time. Life was like that for him. He did not have to seek adventure: his problem would have been to shake off its relentless pursuit.

He had just finished breakfast in his room when there was a knock on his door.

For anyone else, he reflected as he opened the door, it would probably have been only a waiter to take away the tray. For him, it had to be a woman. She was no more than thirty, beautiful in a dark classical way, like a Florentine painting, with a full figure that nullified the discretion of an expensive black dress. The deep shadows under her eyes were not out of a jar.

She said, with very little accent: "Mr. Tombs—may I talk to you? I am Mrs. Ravenna."

"Of course."

She came in and sat down. Simon poured himself another cup of coffee and offered her a cigarette. She shook her head, and he lighted it for himself.

"I feel terribly guilty about your husband," he said. "I might have saved him. I just wasn't thinking fast enough."

"At least you tried to catch the men who killed him. The police told me. I wanted to thank you."

"I'm sorry I wasn't more successful. But if the police catch them, I may be able to identify them. I suppose you haven't any ideas about them?"

"I have none. Filippo was a good man. I didn't think he had any enemies."

"Did he have business rivals?"

"I can't think of any. We were quite rich, but he was successful without hurting anyone. In any case, he had got rid of his interests."

"What were they?"

"He manufactured shoes. It was a good business. But Europe to-day is an uncertain place. There is always fear—of war, of inflations, of unstable governments. So, we were going to America. Our quota number had just come through."

"I know. And he was going to start a new business there?"

"Yes."

"Well," said the Saint, "the police

think it was just an ordinary robbery, don't they?"

"Yes."

"Don't you?"

She twisted her fingers nervously together.

"I don't know what to think."

The Saint stared at a plume of smoke drifting towards the ceiling. He tried half-heartedly not to recognise that his blood was suddenly running faster, in a way that had absolutely nothing to do with the young woman's appealing beauty. But it was no use. He knew, only too well, the symptoms of the almost psychic reflex that told him that he was in it again—up to the ears. . . .

"I'm thinking," he said slowly. "These muggers didn't just pick your husband by accident. They knew what they were after. They didn't even try to look in his pockets. They just grabbed his brief-case and ran. Therefore they knew what was in it. What was that?"

"Some business papers, perhaps?"

"A shoe manufacturer would hardly be likely to have any trade secrets that would be worth going to those lengths to steal."

"You talk like a detective."

"Heaven forbid," said the Saint piously. "I'm only curious. What *did* he have in that brief-case?"

"I can't imagine."

"It must have been something very valuable. And yet you know nothing about it?"

"No."

She was lying, it was as obvious as the Alps; but he tried not to make it so obvious that he saw it.

"Why did you come here," he asked, "when you were just getting ready to move to America?"

"There were a few places we wanted to see before we left, because we didn't know if we would ever come back."

"And yet, on a simple vacation trip like that, your husband brought along something so valuable that he could be murdered for it—and never even mentioned it to you?"

Her black eyes flashed suddenly hard like jet.

"You ask more questions than the police! Are you insulting me?"

"I'm sorry," he said quickly. "I was only trying to help. If we knew what was in that brief-case, we might have a clue to the people who stole it."

She looked down at the twisting of her hands and made a visible effort to hold them still.

"Forgive me," she said in a lowered voice. "I am on edge. It has been such a shock. . . . You are right. The brief-case is important. And that's really what I wanted to talk to you about. Those men—they did get it, didn't they?"

"Why, yes. I was chasing the man who had it. I brought him down, but he kicked me in the face and got away."

"I thought perhaps he might have dropped it."

"I didn't see it again."

"Did the police search for it?"

"I don't think anyone would have. Even if the man dropped it he had plenty of time to pick it up again while I was knocked half silly. Anyway, it wasn't around. And if the police had found it, they'd certainly have returned it to you."

Her eyes examined him uncertainly.

"If anyone found it . . . anyone . . . I would pay a large reward."

"If I knew where to lay my hands on it," said the Saint, a little frigidly, "you wouldn't have to ask for it back, or pay any reward."

She nodded.

"Of course. I'm being stupid. It was a foolish hope. Excuse me." She stood up abruptly. "Thank you for letting me talk to you—and again for what you tried to do. I must not bother you any more."

She held out her hand and was gone.

Simon Templar stood where she had left him and slowly lighted another cigarette. Then he walked to the window. From the balcony outside he was offered a superb panorama of mountains rolling down to the sparkling blue foreground of the lake, where an excursion steamer swam like a toy trailing a brown veil of smoke; but irresistibly his eye was drawn downwards and to the right, towards the corner outside the gardens where he had tackled the stocky man.

He could have persuaded himself that it was only an illusion that he could see something from where he stood; but the echoes of the false notes that the Signora Ravenna had struck were less easy to dismiss.

He put on his jacket and went downstairs. After only a short search in the bushes near where he had tangled with the stocky man, he found the brief-case.

He figured it out as he took it upstairs to his room. The brief-case had indeed flown out of the stocky man's grasp when the Saint tackled him. It had fallen in among the rhododendrons. Then Kleinhaus had come along, shouting. The stocky man had been too scared to stop and look for it. He had scrammed the hell out of there. The police hadn't looked for it, because they assumed it was gone. And the stocky man hadn't come back to look, either because he was afraid to or because he assumed the police would have found it.

And now the Saint had it.

He stood and looked at it for quite a while behind his locked door. He only had to pick up the telephone—he presumed that Signora Ravenna was staying in the same hotel—and tell her to come and get it. Or perhaps the more correct procedure would be to call the police. But either of those moves

called for a man devoid of curiosity, a pillar of convention, a paragon of deafness to the siren voices of intrigue—which the Saint was not.

He opened it.

It required no instruments or violence. Just a steady pull on a zipper. It opened flat, exposing its contents in one dramatic revelation, as if they had been spread out on a tray.

Simon enumerated them as dispassionately as a catalogue, while another part of his mind fumbled woozily over trying to add them into an intelligible total.

Item: one chamois pouch containing a necklace of pink pearls, perfectly graduated. Item: one hotel envelope containing eight diamonds and six emeralds, cut but unset, none less than two carats, each wrapped in a fold of tissue-paper. Item: a cellophane envelope containing ten assorted postage stamps, of an age which suggested that they might be rare and valuable. Item: a book in an antique binding, which from the title pages appeared to be a first edition of Boccaccio's *Amorosa Visione,* published in Milan in 1521. Item: a small oil-painting on canvas without a frame, folded in the middle to fit the briefcase, but apparently protected from creasing by the bulk of the book, signed with the name of Botticelli. Item: a folded sheet of plain notepaper on which was typed in French:

M. Paul Galen
137 Wendenweg
Lucerne

Dear Monsieur Galen,

The bearer, Signor Filippo Ravenna, can be trusted, and his merchandise is most reliable.

With best regards,

The signature was distinctive but indecipherable.

"And a fascinating line of merchandise it is," brooded the Saint. "For a shoemaker, Filippo must have been quite an interesting soul—or was he a heel? . . . A connoisseur and collector of very varied tastes? But, then, why should he bring his prize treasures with him on a trip like this? . . . A sort of Italian Raffles, leading a double life? But a successful business man shouldn't need to steal. And if he did, his instincts would lead him to fancy book-keeping rather than burglary. . . . A receiver of stolen goods? But then he wouldn't need a formal introduction to someone else who sounds as if he might be in that line of business. . . . And what a strange assortment of loot! There has to be a clue there, if I could find it . . ."

But for ten minutes the significance eluded him. And at that point he gave up impatiently.

There was another clue, more positive, more direct in the letter

to the mysterious Paul Galen; and it was one which should not be too difficult to run down.

He put the jewels, the stamps, and the letter in different pockets of his coat. The book and the painting, too bulky to carry inconspicuously, he put back in the brief-case and zippered it up again. He hid it, not too seriously, under the mattress at the head of the bed. Then, with a new lightness in his step, he went out and rang for the elevator.

It took him down one floor, and stopped again. Signora Ravenna got in.

For the space of one skipped heartbeat he wondered whether her room, too, might have a balcony from which she might have watched him retrieve the brief-case from the bushes below; but he met her eyes with iron coolness and only a slight pleasant nod to acknowledge their acquaintance, and his pulse resumed smoothly when she gave back only a small perfunctory smile.

She had put on a small black hat and carried a purse.

"The police have asked me to go and talk to them again," she volunteered. "They have thought of more questions, I suppose. Did they send for you, too?"

"I haven't heard from them since last night," he said. "But I expect they'll get around to me eventually."

It occurred to him that it was a little odd that he had not been asked to repeat the descriptions which Oscar Kleinhaus had promised to relay; but he was too busy with other thoughts to speculate much about the reasons for it. He was grateful enough to have been dropped out of the investigation.

As they strolled across the lobby he said: "Will you think me impertinent if I ask another question?"

"No," she said. "I want your help."

"When your husband went out last night—did he say where he was going?"

She answered mechanically, so that he knew she was reciting something that she had said before.

"I was tired, and he wanted to look for a café where he had heard there were Tirolean singers, so he went alone."

"Didn't you think it strange that he should take his brief-case?"

"I didn't see him take it."

Simon handed her into a taxi without another word.

He walked slowly towards the Schweizerhof. At the corner of the Alpenstrasse he bought a selection of morning papers, and sat down at the nearest café over a cup of chocolate to read methodically through all the headlines.

He had just finished when a shadow fell across the table, and a familiar voice said: "Looking to see whether you are a hero, Mr. Tombs?"

It was Oscar Kleinhaus, and the disarming smile on his cherubic face made his remark innocent of offence. The Saint smiled back, no less disarmingly.

"I was rather curious to see what the newspapers said about it," he admitted. "But they don't seem to have the story yet."

"No, I didn't notice it either. I'm afraid our press is a little slow by American standards. We think that if a story would be good in the morning it will be just as interesting in the evening."

"Would you care to join me?"

Kleinhaus shook his head.

"Unfortunately I have a business appointment. I hope I'll have another opportunity. How long are you staying here?"

"I haven't made any plans. I thought the police would want to know that, but no one's been near me."

"If they caught anyone for you to identify, they would want you. Until then I expect they think it more considerate not to trouble you. But if you asked for your bill at the hotel, I'm sure they would be informed." The round face was completely bland and friendly. "I must go now. But we shall run into each other again. Lucerne is a small town."

He raised his collegiate hat with the same formal courtesy as the night before, and ambled away.

Simon watched him very thoughtfully until he was out of sight. Then he hailed a cab and gave the address which he had found in the brief-case.

The road turned off the Alpenstrasse above the ancient ramparts of the old town and wound up the hillside with ever-widening vistas of the lake into a residential district of neat doll-house chalets. The house where the taxi stopped was high up, perched out on a jutting crag; and Simon had paid off the driver and was confirming the number on the door, with his finger poised over the bell, before he really acknowledged to himself that he had already had two wide-open and obvious opportunities to speak about the brief-case to more or less interested parties since he had found it, and that he had studiously ignored both of them—not to mention that he had made no move whatever to report his discovery to the police. But now he could no longer pretend to be unaware of what he was doing. And it is this chronicler's shocking duty to record that the full and final realisation gave him a lift of impenitent exhilaration which the crisp mountain air could never have achieved alone.

The door opened and a manservant with a seamed grey face, dressed in sombre black, looked him over impersonally.

"Is Monsieur Galen here?" Simon inquired.

"De la part de qui, m'sieur?"

"I am Filippo Ravenna," said the Saint.

The room into which he was ushered was large and sunny, furnished with the kind of antiques that look priceless and yet comfortable to live with. The walls on either side of the fireplace were lined with bookshelves, on two others were paintings and a tapestry, in the fourth french windows opened on to a terrace overlooking the town and the mountains and the lake. The carpet underfoot was Abusson. It was the living-room of a man of wealth and cheerful good taste, and the man-servant looked like an undertaker in it, but he withdrew as soon as he had shown the Saint in.

The man who advanced to greet Simon was altogether different. He had a muscular build rounded with good living, a full crop of black hair becomingly flecked with silver, and strong, fleshy features. White teeth gleamed around a cigar.

"Buon giorno, Signor! Sono felicissimo di vederla."

"We can speak French if you prefer," said the Saint cautiously. It was safer than trying to speak Italian as a native tongue.

"As you wish. Or German, or English even. I struggle with all of them. I want my clients to feel comfortable, and they come from so many places." He waved Simon to a couch facing the windows. "You have a letter, perhaps?"

Simon handed him the introduction. Galen glanced at it and put it in his pocket and sat down.

"I knew you were coming," he said apologetically, "but it is necessary to be careful."

"Of course."

"Sometimes my clients are so preoccupied with evading their own export restrictions that they forget we have Swiss import regulations, too. That is their own affair, but naturally I want no trouble with the authorities here."

"I understand your position," said the Saint, understanding very little.

"Worse still," Galen said talkatively, "there are people who try to offer me stolen things. That is why it is so pleasant to meet someone who is recommended like yourself. Aside from the risk involved with stolen property, it is so much trouble to sell, and the prices are bound to be miserable. It is not worth it."

Simon nodded sympathetically, while his brain seemed to flounder in an intangible quicksand. So the eccentric assortment of treasures in Ravenna's brife-case were supposed to be his own legitimate property, which finally disposed of one theory, but at the same time cut away one possible piece of solid ground. Why, then, all the secrecy and mystery?

The Saint said conversationally: "So your clients come from all over Europe, do they?"

"From everywhere between the Iron Curtain and Portugal—every country where there are these annoying restrictions on foreign exchange and the free movement of wealth. What a pity there have to be so many barriers in this primitive civilisation! However, I have a nice central location, and Swiss money is good anywhere in the world. Also, I am very discreet. There is no law here against me buying anything I choose, and not a word about our transaction will get back to Italy from me. Other people's problems are my business opportunity, but I prefer to think of myself as a kind of liberator." He laughed genially. "Now, what do you have to sell?"

Simon gave him the chamois bag.

Galen took out the pink pearl necklace and held it up to the light.

"It is beautiful," he said admiringly.

He studied it more closely, and then pondered for several seconds while he carefully evened the ash on his cigar.

"I can give you seventy-five thousand Swiss francs," he said at length. "Or, if you like, the equivalent in dollars, deposited at any bank in New York. That would be something over seventeen thousand dollars. It is a good price in the circumstances." He draped the necklace over his fingers and admired it again; then his shrewd dark eyes turned back to the Saint. "But it is not a lot of capital for you to start building a new fortune in America. Surely you have some other things to offer me?"

Simon Templar took an infinitesimal moment to reply. And in that apocalyptic instant he realized that he had found a foothold again with a suddenness that literally jarred the breath out of him.

It was all so simple, so obvious that in retrospect he wondered how it could ever have baffled him. Filippo Ravenna had been going to America to live and to make a fresh start. Ravenna was rich, but he would not be allowed to transfer all his assets across the Atlantic just by asking for a bank draft. Like many another European, he had nothing but money which was not translatable through ordinary channels. But someone had told him about Paul Galen. So Ravenna had bought things. Things whose only connecting characteristics were that they were relatively small, relatively light in weight, relatively easy to smuggle, and very valuable; things, moreover, which a man in his position could acquire without attracting undue attention. And he had brought them to Switzerland to convert back into hard money—with an introduction to Paul Galen, who had made an international business out of co-operating in such evasions, whose reputation in such tricky-minded circles was doubtless a guarantee of comparatively fair dealing and absolute discretion.

All that part of it was dazzlingly

clear; and the other part was starting to grow clearer—some of it, at least.

The Saint found himself saying, almost absent-mindedly: "I left the other things at the hotel. You understand, I thought we should get acquainted first."

Somewhere outside the room he was aware of indistinct voices, but it was a rather sub-conscious impression which he only recalled afterwards, for at the moment it did not seem that they could concern him.

"I hope I have made a good impression," Galen said with lively good humour. "What else did you bring?"

"I have a small Botticelli," said the Saint slowly. He was stalling for time really, while his mind raced ahead from the knowledge it now had to fit together the pieces that still had to tie in. "It is a museum piece. And a first edition of Boccaccio, in perfect condition——"

The door behind him burst open as if a tornado had struck it, and that was when he actually remembered the premonitory sounds of argument that he had heard.

It was the Signora Ravenna, with her bosom heaving and her black eyes blazing with dark fire. Behind her followed the funereal manservant, looking apologetically helpless.

"Go on," she said. "What else was there?"

Galen was on his feet as quickly as a big dog. He glanced at the Saint with quizzical wariness as Simon stood up more leisurely.

"Do you know this lady?"

"Certainly," said the Saint calmly. "She is Signora Ravenna."

Galen almost relaxed.

"A thousand pardons. You should have told me your wife——"

"I am not his wife," the young woman cut him short passionately. "My husband was murdered last night, by robbers who stole his brief-case with the things he brought to sell. This imposter is an American who calls himself Tombs—he is probably the employer of the men who killed my husband!"

Galen moved easily around the couch, without apparent haste or agitation.

"That is quite an extraordinary statement," he remarked temperately. "But no doubt one of you can at least prove your identity."

"I can," said Signora Ravenna. She fumbled in her handbag. "I can show you my passport. Ask him to show you his!"

"I'll save you the trouble," said the Saint, amiably in English. "I concede that this is Signora Ravenna, and it's true that she's been a widow for about twelve hours."

"Then your explanation had better be worth listening to," Galen said in the same language.

It was produced so smoothly and casually that Simon never knew where it came from, but now there was an automatic in Galen's hand, the muzzle lined up with Simon's

midriff. The melancholy manservant remained in the doorway, and somehow he no longer looked apologetic.

Simon's gaze slid languidly over the barrel of the gun and up to Galen's coldly questioning face. It was no performance that he scarcely seemed to notice the weapon. He was too happy with the way the other fragments of the puzzle were falling into place to care.

"I happened to see Signor Ravenna jumped on last night by the two thugs who stole his brief-case," he said. "I imagine he was on his way to see you then. I tried to catch them, but I didn't do so good. There's an independent witness, a local citizen, who saw me try, and he's on record with the police. . . . This morning Signora Ravenna came to my room and asked me about the brief-case. She said she had no idea what was in it and couldn't imagine why anyone would attack her husband. I told her that so far as I knew the thieves had got away with it."

"A bluff, to try to make it look as if they weren't working for you," Signora Ravenna said vehemently. "You had it all the time!"

"I didn't," said the Saint easily. "But after you left, I went on thinking. It occurred to me that there was just an outside chance that the fellow I nearly caught had dropped it, and then nobody had thought of looking for it—everybody taking it for granted that somebody else had got it. I went back to the spot and looked. Sure enough, there it was in the bushes. I took it back to my room."

"You see, he admits it! I saw him again after that, and he didn't say anything about finding it. He meant to steal it all the time. The only thing he doesn't confess is that the whole thing was planned!"

"While Signora Ravenna was asking me questions," Simon continued imperturbably, "I also asked her a few. And I knew damned well she was lying. That made me curious. So I opened the brief-case. I found the painting, the book, the necklace which you have—and of course, that letter of introduction to you. It was just too much for my inquisitive nature. So I came here, using Ravenna's name, to try and find out what was going on. You've been kind enough to explain the background to me. I now know that Ravenna was simply trying to turn his assets into American money which he could use when he emigrated—which, you've explained to me, isn't a crime here, whatever they think of it in Italy. So I'm satisfied about that—but not about why Signora Ravenna told me so many lies."

"I leave that to you, Monsieur Galen," said the woman with a triumphant shrug. "I would not even tell the police, still less a perfect stranger."

Galen's dispassionate eyes rested immovably on the Saint's face.

"And what is your business, Mr. Tombs?"

"Just think of me," said the Saint, "as a guy with a weakness for puzzles, and an incorrigible asker of questions. I have a few more." He looked at Signora Ravenna again. "Are you positive your husband couldn't have discussed this deal with anyone?"

"Only with his best friend, who gave him the introduction to Monsieur Galen."

"And you're sure you never mentioned it to anybody?"

"Of course not."

"But as I said this morning, the jokers who waylaid your husband knew he was carrying something valuable, and even knew it was in his brief-case. How do you account for that?"

"I don't know how crooks like you find out these things," she flared. "Why don't you tell us?"

Simon shook his head.

"I suggest," he said rather forensically, "that those crooks could only have known because you told them—because you hired them to get rid of your husband and bring you back his most negotiable property."

The servant in the doorway was pushed suddenly aside, and a short spherical man elbowed his way unceremoniously past him into the room.

"I am Inspector Kleinhaus, of the police," he said, "and I should also like to hear the answer to that."

"You see," he explained diffidently, "we had a friendly tip from Italy that two known Italian criminals had bought tickets to Switzerland. It was my job to keep an eye on them. I'm afraid they gave me the slip last night, for long enough to attack and rob Signor Ravenna. When I met you at the scene of the crime, Mr. Tombs, I didn't know if you might be associated with them, so I didn't introduce myself completely. But we kept watch on you. We saw you find the brief-case and take it to your room —incidentally, we recovered it as soon as you went out, with its interesting contents."

Galen put the automatic in his pocket and took out the necklace.

"Except this," he said conscientiously.

"Thank you," said Kleinhaus. "Meanwhile, Mr. Tombs, we went on keeping an eye on you, to see where you'd lead us. I still didn't know how deeply you were involved in the affair, and I was puzzled as you seem to have been by the things Ravenna was carrying and by the motive for the robbery. Most of that has now been cleared up. One of my men followed you here, and I followed Signora Ravenna myself after I talked to her at the police station a little while ago. Her answers seemed as suspicious to me as they apparently did to you."

"How long have you been listening?" Simon asked.

"Monsieur Galen's servant was too agitated by the way Signora Ravenna behaved when he told her her husband was already here to remember to shut the front door, so I've been in the hall all the time. It was very illuminating." The detective's blue eyes shifted again. "Now, Signora Ravenna, I still want to hear what you were going to say."

Her face was a white mask.

"I have nothing to say! You can't be serious about such an accusation—and from such a person! Can you believe I would have my own husband murdered?"

"Such things have happened," Kleinhaus said sadly. "However, we can check in another way. I'm glad to be able to tell you now that the two men have already been caught. Mr. Tombs will be able to identify them. Then you can confront them, and we'll see what they say when they realise there's only one way to save their own skins."

It was pitiful to see the false indignation drain out of her face, and the features turn ugly and formless with terror. She moistened her lips, and her throat moved, but no sound came. And then, as if she understood that in that silence she had already betrayed her own guilt for all to see, she gave an inarticulate little cry and ran past Galen, shoving him out of the way with a hysterical violence that sent him staggering, and ran out through the french windows, out on to the sunlit terrace that went to the edge of the cliff where the house perched, and kept on running. . . .

Inspector Kleinhaus, presently, was the first to turn from looking down over the edge. With a conclusive gesture he replaced his absurdly juvenile hat.

"Perhaps that saves a lot of unpleasantness," he remarked. "Well, I must still ask you to identify the two men, Mr. Tombs—your name really is Tombs, is it?"

"It sounds sort of ominous, doesn't it?" said the Saint easily.

He still had eight diamonds, six emeralds, and ten valuable stamps in his pockets which no one was left to ask embarrassing questions about, and at such a time it would have been very foolish to draw any more attention to himself.

I am not a murderer!

by . . . Wenzell Brown

I DID not kill Anton Halz.

There must be somebody who will believe me. For I have told the truth from the beginning. Now I must repeat my story once more, recalling each detail with meticulous honesty in the belief that there is one among you who will recognize the truth. Then there may be some hope for me.

The first time I saw the boy was in a snowstorm, one of those storms in which the flakes come down in lazy white puffs, obscuring everything more than a few feet away. I was a boy myself then and I was coming home from school late, having been kept in for some minor breach of discipline. The way led down a steep hill where the outer sections of the sidewalks were covered with icy slides. The children loved the slides and the adults were sufficiently tolerant not to cover them with ashes. Now they were concealed beneath a thin layer of feathery snow.

The boy appeared silently out of the blanketing whiteness of the storm. He stopped, facing me. There was nothing remarkable

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Wenzell Brown, while better known for his novels and books dealing with juvenile delinquency, will be remembered by readers of this magazine for his superb study of a youngster who is the witness to a killing and can do nothing about it (WITNESS TO MURDER, July 1958 SMM). Here he explores the very special world of a troubled mind.

about him. He was just a skinny kid with a pale face and eyes that were overly large. He wore a cap, a shabby jacket, brown corduroy pants. He looked vaguely familiar, though I couldn't place him, didn't know his name. He sidled up to me, his movements shy and furtive. We stood together for a minute or two with the snow falling all about us. Then he made a short run, hit the slide and went skimming over the slick surface. I took off after him and was right behind when he fell in the drift of snow. He grabbed my ankle and I went tumbling down on top of him. We rolled over, pummelling each other playfully, then rose, heading for the next slide, jostling each other, falling sometimes, laughing and shouting until we reached the bottom of the hill.

I was out of breath, excited and eager for more play. But not the boy. He stood stock still, his head cocked to one side watching me. His eyes were veiled, with a trace of mockery in them. Suddenly I was embarrassed. I shuffled my feet and pointed down the street toward my house.

"You going my way?" I asked.

He shook his head and his teeth showed in a tight little grin. Without speaking, he started away.

"Hey, wait," I called. "What's your name?"

He turned and his dark eyes passed over me. "I ain't got no name."

"You gotta have a name."

"Why?"

"Everybody has."

"Not me."

Then he was gone. I chased after him for a few steps but he was lost in the thickening snow and I had a crazy feeling that he'd never been there at all.

After that I used to catch a glimpse of him from time to time, in the streets, in a far corner of the playground, in the corridors of the school. He was always alone, never in a group or line and, if I tried to go to him, by the time I'd reach the spot where I'd last seen him, he had always disappeared.

I asked other boys about him, especially Eddie McNamara who was my best friend, but there was never time to point him out and when I tried to describe him there wasn't much I could say—a skinny kid, pale face, big eyes. As Eddie remarked scornfully, the description would fit half the kids in school.

Then one Saturday morning the boy approached me again. Spring had come and the sunlight was hard and bright, with a glare that hurt the eyes. I was strolling along Pine Street when he stepped out of a doorway as though to block my passage.

I stopped and said, "Hi, where you been?"

"Nowhere. What you doin'?"

"Nothing."

"Me too."

We were still standing there, looking at each other when I saw Eddie on the opposite side of the street. I yelled at him three or four times before he heard me and started in our direction. When he was close, I looked around for the boy but I couldn't find him. Maybe he'd ducked into another doorway. There were plenty of them about.

I said to Eddie, "Did you see the kid?"

"What kid?"

"The one that was with me."

Eddie gave me a funny look. "Who you kidding? You was alone."

I let it drop. I didn't want an argument with Eddie. But he'd practically called me a liar. From then on we weren't close friends any more.

As the years went by I saw the boy less often. He was a shadow moving along the street, a figure glimpsed in the park. Someone on the sidelines watching a game. He rarely came close and never spoke. There was just the flicker of his eyes mocking me. From time to time I tried to single him out to an acquaintance. It never worked. Before I could draw their attention to him, he was gone. After awhile I gave it up. What did he matter to me? He was just some stupid jerk of a kid who didn't even have a name. I almost forgot him.

Then when I was fifteen he came into my life again. I was a crazy, mixed-up kid with a lot of romantic notions and a burning desire to write. Sometimes when I was supposed to be in bed, I'd crawl out of my window to the porch roof and drop to the ground. I'd prowl the streets of the sleeping city with no purpose but a sort of inner excitement. Maybe there'd be a fragment of a poem by Poe or Coleridge singing in my mind, or bits of the prose poetry of Thomas Wolfe. Every lighted window was a mystery; every distant footfall a promise of adventure. There are kids like that and I was one of them.

It must have been close to midnight when I passed the alley. I'd been by it hundreds of times and never given it a second thought. Just a cindered driveway between Merlin's grocery and the warehouse next door. A high wooden fence blocked the passage to the street beyond. I was humming to myself and keeping in the shadows because I didn't want anyone to spot me and tattle to my old man.

A sharp sibilant sound made me swing around. I studied the strip of darkness without seeing anything until a second hiss drew my attention to a recessed doorway. A black figure, scarcely visible in the pocket of deep shadow, stood there. I think I knew it was the boy even before he came to the rim of the shadow where the feeble glow of the corner street light made a pale mask of his face.

He said, "Hi! I been waitin' for you a long time."

"How could you be? I just happened by."

"Sure, I know." His shoulder lifted and his teeth glinted as he gave his crooked smile. He stepped back into shadow and said, "Come on. I got something to show you."

"What?"

"Come and see." He sidled away, blending into the darkness but I knew that he was still watching me.

I started into the alley after him. My eyes had grown accustomed to the dark and I could see his thin figure, moving wraith-like ahead of me. If he made any sound it was eaten up by the crunch of my shoes on the cinders.

The alley widened at the back of Merlin's grocery. He stopped there. "You're a noisy guy. I could hear you more'n a block away."

"So what?"

"So you could bring the cops snooping around. So you could queer my pitch."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Maybe you don't at that." His silhouetted figure rose in front of me, arms akimbo, legs spraddled. "It don't make no difference anyhow. I got all the loot I can carry stashed on the other side of the fence."

He bent forward, then straightened, a long cardboard box in each hand. He seemed to be weighing them, using his palms as scales. Suddenly he thrust them at me. "Here, kid. Take 'em. Like I said, I got all I can handle."

Instinctively I reached for them, then let my arms drop. "What are they?"

"A gift from me to you. Never say I didn't give you nothing. Here—" He extended the boxes again, pushing them at my chest. One fell to the cinders with a little crackling noise. I caught the other and knelt to pick up the one at my feet. When I rose the boy was half way to the fence. He grasped the top rail and swung himself high. For a moment he was limned against the ashen sky.

"Hey—hey! Come back here," I yelled and rushed after him. But he had disappeared and the fence was too high for me to vault.

I was still standing there stupidly when a spot-light caught me in its red glow and a bull-like voice echoed all around me. I turned into the glare and was blinded by it. I crouched, too scared to run or even think, until a bulky figure separated itself from the prowl car at the alley's mouth and strode toward me. A cop. Maybe he wasn't so big but right then he seemed ten feet high and five feet wide.

His voice was a roar. "What you got there, kid? Huh?"

I'd forgotten about the boxes. I looked down at them and now I could see what they were. Two cartons of cigarettes. I let them

spill to the ground and tried to run. But it was too late. The cop grabbed me by the collar, then twisted my arm in back of me until I was standing on tip-toe, gritting my teeth not to scream. He frog-marched me to the back door of Merlin's grocery and held me while his flashlight probed the darkness. A pane of glass high up in the door was broken and the door itself was ajar.

"We got you red-handed this time, kid. You want to talk?"

I couldn't have said anything if my life had depended on it. I tried to cower away but the cop's left hand, weighted with the flashlight, jabbed up at me. My head snapped back and pain piled over me, numbing me so that I hardly felt the second blow.

Another voice spoke out of the darkness. "Take it easy, Cal. I think I know this kid." Fingers gripped my shoulder. "You're Tom Morshak's boy, aren't you?" And when I didn't answer, he added, "Sure you are. This is going to be tough on your old man."

After that everything was like a bad dream. The ride to the police station. The long wait in a shabby little anteroom with the big cop, whom I now recognized as Cal Treubel, standing guard at the door. Then my father was there, his face etched in hard lines. I tried to hold back the tears but I couldn't stop sniffling as I poured out the whole story to him. When I was finished, his expression hadn't changed and his fists were doubled up in hard knots.

"You don't believe me." I spoke the words incredulously.

My father sighed. "You're my son, Nick. I've got to believe you."

But he didn't. I saw that and I turned my face away.

My father went into the corridor and I could hear him talking with the Chief of Police, his voice insistent, almost pleading, "Couldn't it be the way the boy says? Couldn't he be telling the truth?"

"Sure he could, Tom. But is it likely? The kid's alone in the alley with a couple of cartons of stolen cigarettes in his mits. The back door of Joe Merlin's place is open, its windows smashed. You fill in the picture, Tom."

"Maybe there was another boy."

"It could be, but nobody saw him. Your kid says he's known him for years but can't put a name to him, not even a nickname, and his description's not worth a damn. I hate to do this to you, Tom, but we might as well lay it on the line, Nick's in trouble."

"How much trouble?"

"That depends on Joe Merlin. He's a mean so-and-so but maybe you can buy him off."

I didn't listen any more. I learned a lot of things that night and one of them was that, if you tried hard enough, you could wall yourself off as though you were in an underwater cave where no sound or

sight from outside could reach you. My old man drove me home. We didn't exchange a word until we were in the house. My mother was waiting for us. She'd made coffee and sandwiches but none of us could eat. I sat down at the table and felt my mother's arms steal around me but I thrust them away and stood up and faced my father.

I said, "You don't believe me, Dad. But I'm going to make you. I'm going to find that kid and beat the truth out of him. I'm going to make him come here and tell it all to you."

My father's face was calm. "You do that, son."

"I will." I ran out of the kitchen and up to my room. For the first time in my life, I locked the door. Then I flung myself face down on the bed and bawled.

The next day I started my search for the kid. Every day, from the time school let out until long after dark, I walked the streets, peering into every face. I haunted candy shops, poolrooms, parks. Every place where I had seen the kid. Every place where he might conceivably be. Weeks stretched into months but I didn't give up. Meanwhile I heard no more about the theft. Maybe my father had fixed things up with Joe Merlin. I couldn't care less. My old man hadn't believed me and I told myself I hated him. But at least I was going to prove him wrong. So I kept on hunting, long after I knew it was futile, that the boy must have moved away, left the town for good.

I didn't really give up hope until my father died. I was in college then and I came home to the funeral of a stranger. I couldn't even grieve at his going. For me he'd died long ago.

It was during the following Easter holidays that I ran across traces of the boy again. At my mother's suggestion I was going through my father's bureau, picking out the few things I wanted to keep, making a pile of the others to send to the Salvation Army. My mother always lined the drawers with old newspapers and it was in one of these that I found the picture. The boy's face was twisted away from the camera and I didn't recognize him at first. He looked pitifully small between the two policemen who were leading him, handcuffed, down the steps of City Hall. My eyes went to the caption: CAT BURGLAR REFUSES TO GIVE NAME. The story was brief, only an inch or so. The youth of the picture had been apprehended while burglarizing an untenanted apartment. He had been caught by the beat policeman who had been summoned by the superintendent of the building after he had heard suspicious sounds coming from the supposedly empty rooms. The youth had been arraigned in court where he had

steadfastly refused to reveal his identity.

The newspaper in my hand was brittle with age and had turned a soft brownish yellow. I ripped out the picture and rushed to my own room to examine it through a magnifying glass. As the figure came leaping up at me, the details made enormous by the powerful lens, any doubts I might have had disappeared. I couldn't see much of the boy's face but the profile was the same, the line of the hair, the angle of the narrow shoulders. I went back to my father's room slowly, wishing Dad were alive, that I could tell him of my discovery. For the first time I was able to mourn for him.

My mother came bustling into the room and, for the moment, I couldn't bear to listen to her determinedly cheerful voice. I left the clipping on the bureau and hurried out of the house to wander the streets at random. I had no conscious goal but my footsteps took me to police headquarters. I hesitated across the street, looking at the ugly doorway flanked by balls of stained blue glass. Then with swift determination I walked to the entrance.

The old Chief of Police had retired and I recognized the new chief at once. He was Cal Treubel, the cop who had twisted my arm in the alley when I was a kid. He spotted me too. His eyes went blank and a little grimace curled the corner of his mouth.

I stumbled through my story. Long before I'd finished, Treubel's fingers were drumming on the scarred top of his oak table. When he spoke his voice was a growl. "A cat burglar who didn't give his name—I don't remember nothing like that. Sure, a lot of guys try to hold out on you about their names. But they don't get away with it for long. Not since I been chief. Anyway what's it to you?"

I tried to explain but it was like talking to a slab of meat. After awhile I gave up.

As I rose to leave he looked at me through slitted eyes. He grated, "Look, kid, why are you sweating over a pinch that's five years old? You didn't serve no time. Hell, you didn't even get your name on the blotter. So why don't you run home and keep your nose clean, huh?"

I didn't run home. I stopped at a tavern for a couple of beers and to chew things over in my own mind. Dusk had fallen before I reached the house. A light was burning in my father's room. I went upstairs. The room that had looked like a cyclone had hit it was now as neat as a pin. I crossed to the bureau where I'd left the clipping. It was gone. Mom was cooking dinner downstairs. I went to the kitchen to speak to her. It was just as I had supposed. She'd cleaned the room while I was gone and burned the old newspapers in

the furnace. There was no sense griping about it. Tomorrow I'd go to the newspaper morgue and run through their old files. Sooner or later I'd come to the picture of the boy and maybe there'd be a follow-up story that would tell me his name.

But that wasn't the way it went. I spent most of the next day thumbing through musty racks of papers without finding the picture I wanted. The boy had eluded me again. I spoke to the woman in charge of the morgue. She tried to be helpful. She informed me that there were three editions of the paper. Sometimes a picture would be in one edition and not the others. Not all of them were on file. Now, if I could give her a name—. I wanted to scream at her but at least she'd provided a reasonable explanation for my failure. The picture was not an hallucination; it was as real as the boy himself.

The following morning I returned to college. Before I went, I told myself the search was ended. Even if I should find the boy it would do me no good. For too long he'd been an obsession. The thing to do was banish him from my memory.

I felt a freedom such as I had not known for years. I could devote myself to my studies and my hobby of writing without the shadowy presence of the boy lurking in the back of my mind. But my newly found tranquility was cut short at the end of a few weeks.

The college was an old one. Two quadrangles of green, dotted with brick buildings, perched halfway up a hillside overlooking a sprawling factory city. My room was at the edge of the campus in a frame house owned by a widow of one of the professors. Mrs. Farnsworth made something of a pet of me. Each morning she brought me breakfast and, with it, the local newspaper neatly folded on the corner of the tray. Usually I skimmed the headlines and let it go at that.

Probably I wouldn't have noticed the story if Mrs. Farnsworth hadn't lingered over my tray one morning. With a shrivelled finger she pointed to a headline near the bottom of the front page. "Isn't it awful?" she complained in her querulous voice. "Nobody's safe any longer. Not even in their own homes."

I nodded absently and my gaze automatically followed her finger. The headline came jumping out at me: PHANTOM BURGLAR STRIKES AGAIN. There was no reason why I should be upset but my hand was shaking even before I read the story.

> For the eleventh successive night the mysterious cat burglar who has been dubbed "The Phantom" by the police, has carried out a successful raid. This

time his victim was Mrs. Jason Thoms who lives alone in an apartment at 1032 Euclid Avenue. Mrs. Thoms was awakened shortly before midnight by the surreptitious sounds of a prowler in her room. She flicked on her light and caught a fleeting view of the burglar as he escaped through the doorway of her bedroom. She describes the intruder as a dark, slender youth of about twenty, wearing a black leather jacket and gray slacks. Mrs. Thoms informed the police that two diamond rings, an amber necklace and (*Continued on page 16*).

I didn't turn to page sixteen. Instead I crumpled the paper into a ball and flung it from me. While I dressed, I told myself that it was nonsense to believe that the thief was the boy. And even if my intuition was guiding me correctly, what could I do? Dared I go to the police with such a slender story? I remembered the hard, disbelieving eyes of the police chief in my home town. Was it likely that I'd be treated better here? And what could I tell them anyway? That I'd known the boy long ago, that we'd slid on the ice together, that he'd handed me two cartons of stolen cigarettes one night in a black alley? I tried to shrug off my suspicions and hurried to my morning classes. But I doubt if I heard a word of any lecture that day.

For two more days I did nothing. Each morning brought a fresh report on the activities of "The Phantom". On the third morning banner headlines screamed the news: CAT BURGLAR TURNS KILLER.

His victim was a school teacher, Margaret Sorenson. His weapon a knife. As I read the story, it was as though I were beside the burglar, watching every move. I saw the boy as he crawled soundlessly along the platform of the fire escape and peered in through the open window of the dark room. He dropped to the carpeted floor and stood tense, listening to the stertorous breathing of the sleeping woman. He took a cautious step forward, then another. The hooded beam of his miniature flashlight played across the bureau top, picking out the worthless objects there—the atomizer, the comb and brush, the little pile of junk jewelry.

The light strayed toward the bedside table and glistened on the patent leather of a handbag. I held my breath as the boy made his wary passage across the room until he was close enough to link his fingers around the looped handles of the bag and draw it toward him. A water glass, unseen among the shadows, suddenly tipped over, rolling across the hard surface of the table, toppling to the floor with a tinkle of broken glass.

The boy froze in his tracks, motionless, silent. The harsh breathing of the woman on the bed was

broken off with a sharp gasp. She stirred and started to sit up, her hand moving to the chain of the bedside lamp. Light illuminated the room and fell on the crouched figure of the boy. A snick of sound, then the glint of steel as a switchblade appeared in his hand.

In my mind's eye I could see the woman's pale, frightened face, the instinctive gesture of her hand as she covered her throat, the puckering of her lips as she braced herself to scream.

The scream never came. The boy was on her, attacking with swift, ruthless efficiency. The knife sliced deep into the bloated flesh of her throat, cutting the spread fingers in its deadly course. The first thrust of the blade had been enough to kill but the boy was not satisfied. Three times more the blade arched upward, caught the light, then swept down, burying itself in the woman's breast.

The boy turned out the light then and stood in the darkness once more, listening for some warning of danger. There was none. He slid across the room to the open window and hitched his thin body over the sill. As he made his descent along the iron bars, the striated shadows of the lattice-work fell about him, cloaking him with invisibility until he himself became one of the shadows, a figure without substance, a chimera of the mind, yet no less real for that.

When I had finished the story, nausea twisted at my stomach and beaded my face with sweat. The scene, so vivid in my mind, had been built out of whole cloth. What did I have to go on? The bitterness of old memories. An almost obsessive belief in the evil of the boy. Nothing more. I berated myself as a superstitious fool frightened by baseless fantasies but, even so, I could not rid myself of my conviction of the boy's guilt.

What if he should kill again and I had given no warning? Would I not become a partner in the crime? All day I struggled with my problem but that night I reached my decision. I must go to the police.

The police station looked like the one in my home town. The same wide ugly doors, the same disfiguring blue lights. Even Captain Benson, to whom I talked, bore a strong resemblance to Cal Treubel. His red-veined face remained blank and his rasping voice was an uninflected monotone. Only his eyes mirrored his disbelief as he repeated for the tenth time, "You say you've known this guy for years but you don't know his name, where he's ever lived or if he's got a family. Is that right?"

I tried to choke down my rage but it got the better of me. I said, "I've told you all I know. If you don't believe me, to hell with you."

I spun around and started for the door. The knob was in my hand when he called my name.

I turned slowly. He was coming

around the corner of his desk, moving clumsily but fast. I could sense the power in the gross body and a senseless curl of fear crept over me. He stopped, facing me, so close that I could smell the sourness of his breath.

"Where were you last night, Morshak? Say from eleven o'clock until about midnight?"

My mouth dropped open in surprise. Then anger drove away caution. I said, "What's it to you?" and yanked at the door.

His fingers were like a vise on my arm as he swung me about. "I asked you a question, Morshak. I want an answer."

My mind was racing, recognizing the danger before I spoke. I tried bluster to cover my confusion. "Get your hands off me," I shouted. "I came here like a decent citizen to cooperate with the police. Would I do that if I had anything to hide?"

"You might. You wouldn't be the first murderer who got his bangs out of trying to lead the police astray."

"Murderer? You're crazy."

"Am I? Look at yourself in the mirror sometime. Then read a description of the Phantom. About twenty. Black hair. Sallow skin. Slight build. Regular features. It fits you right down to the ground."

It was true enough, I realized. There'd always been a superficial resemblance between the boy and myself. But it wasn't close. No one could mistake us if they got a good look.

"What about clothes?" Benson rasped. "Have you got a black leather jacket, Morshak?"

"Sure. Me and every second guy in town."

"But no one except you came snooping around trying to feed me a line about the Phantom being an old pal. A stud you recognize from a description but one you can't even name. So answer my question, Morshak. Where were you last night?"

My instinct was to say I'd spent the night in my room studying. But Mrs. Farnsworth might have heard my footfall on the stairs, might even have glimpsed me as I crossed the porch. It was better to tell it straight than to get caught up in a network of lies. My old habit of prowling the streets late at night was one I'd carried with me through the years. Every night when I'd finished studying, I'd wander about the deserted campus or along the lonely lanes which led high up into the hills. From the crests I could see the lights of the city spreading out beneath me and the sight always gave me a sense of power that was almost God-like.

But how did you tell that to a mean cop? I did the best I could, but when I was finished I could see that he was dissatisfied, still suspicious. All the same he let me leave.

I told myself that I had nothing to worry about, that I'd done my duty and now I was through. But fear walked all about me. Or maybe it was inside of me. All I know was that it was a pervasive thing. Behind me, I thought I heard footsteps matching my own, but when I turned there was no motion, no sound. Or was the patch of darkness thrown against the wall of a building a man? I shrugged. Maybe Benson was having me tailed. So what? I'd give him a run for his money.

The sidewalk up ahead was stippled with yellow light glimmering through the dirt-encrusted window of a bar. Through the closed door came the muted roar of a juke-box. I pushed my way in. It was a dingy place. The few customers who lined the bar were in work clothes and they eyed me warily. I ordered beer and carried the stein to the last of the empty booths. I tried to drink slowly but soon my restlessness got the better of me. I gulped the last of my beer and headed for the door. I walked fast and I no longer listened for footsteps. The clatter of my own heels was enough.

The street curved upward to the college. I cut across the campus, still walking fast but now the grass cushioned my footfalls. I paused halfway across the quadrangle and, under the guise of lighting a cigarette, let my gaze sweep over the smooth lawn. No sign of a follower. I cursed myself as a suspicious fool and hurried on to the copse of wood that separated the Farnsworth house from the campus.

The night-light in the front hallway turned the glass panel of the door into a square of pale yellow and, as I approached, a second light snapped on in the room where Mrs. Farnsworth slept. I pictured her in her faded rose dressing gown coming to the doorway, as she so often did, to ask me if I'd like a cup of cocoa and a sandwich before going to bed.

My thoughts were filled with Mrs. Farnsworth as I slipped beneath the low-hanging branches of the elms that cast their shadows over the path and for a moment the soft sibilant hiss that came from the darkness escaped my notice. Then I skidded to a stop and spun around. The hiss sounded a second time. The boy was there, hidden in the shadows. I knew it, though I could not see him.

I stood with the moonlight on me but, as he had done that night in the alley more than five years ago, he came no closer than the rim of light. He had grown since I had seen him last and the pale face was older but there was no mistaking him, not even here in the half light. The dark, overly large eyes held the familiar mockery, the thin mouth was twisted in the same derisive grin. Here was the boy for whom I had searched so long, turned into a man. And now, when

I no longer wanted him, he had sought me out.

His lips scarcely moved as he spoke and his voice was a taut whisper. He said, "Hi, kid. You always were the noisy one."

"What are you doing here?"

"Like always. Waiting for you, Nick."

"How do you know my name? Where I live?"

"I know all about you, kid."

"Why?"

"You're my protection. The perfect patsy. The fall guy. But you stepped out of line tonight. You shouldn't have gone running to the cops. That ain't nice, Nick. You got to learn to keep your lip zipped."

"Why don't you leave me alone?"

He spread his hands in an exaggerated gesture. "Ha, he asks me that. He tries to fit me in the hot squat. And he asks why don't I leave him alone."

My fists doubled and I took a step toward him. I said, "You bastard, you framed me once. I ought to knock your teeth in."

He didn't back away and his grin became a little wider. "It was only a little frame, Nick. And your old man sprung you. So what's the beef?"

"You killed Margaret Sorenson."

His shoulder lifted slightly. "Me? I thought it was you, Nick. I really did."

I lunged at him then but he danced to one side and the toe of his shoe lanced into my ankle. I gasped with pain and almost fell but I caught hold of a tree trunk.

I was shaking with anger. "Who are you?" I shouted. "Tell me your name or by God, I'll beat it out of you."

He backed away slowly. Just a step or two, and stopped, his weight on the balls of his feet. The click was scarcely audible but loud enough to draw my eyes to his hand. The six-inch blade of a knife gleamed dully in the pale light.

He said, "You're stupid, Nick. How many times have I got to tell you. I ain't got no name."

I could feel the anger within me shifting to panic, to trembling futility. I was not a fighter. Even without his knife, I couldn't have taken the boy. I tried to think of something to say to cloak my cowardice but before the words took shape, he had sidled deeper into the darkness and was gone.

Mrs. Farnsworth peered through the doorway of her room as I entered the hall. A look of surprise clouded her cheerful face. "Why Nick," she said, "I thought I heard you in your room a few minutes ago."

"No, I just came in."

"I must be getting old. I could have sworn—" Her voice trailed off ineffectually. Then she added hopefully, "What about some cocoa, Nick? I've some cold chicken too."

"Not tonight." I said it brusquely and felt a pang of guilt at her crest-

fallen look but I was in no mood for idle chatter. I took the stairs two at a time, feeling her eyes on my back.

I saw the necklace as soon as I flicked on the overhead lights. It formed a small yellowish-brown pool in the center of the green bedspread. I took a hesitant step toward it. Closer at hand, the beads looked like a coiled snake. The color was amber and the word evoked a memory. Mrs. Jason Thoms had listed the articles which the Phantom had stolen from her. Among them was an amber necklace.

What was it the boy had said to me? "You're the perfect patsy." And now he was proving his point, showing how easy it would be to frame me. Benson's red-veined face and suspicious eyes formed a frightening picture in my mind. What if he should decide to search my room tonight and should find the necklace? The boy might tip him off by a telephone call. Somehow I must get rid of the beads quickly. But how? I could not leave the room again without arousing Mrs. Farnsworth's suspicions. I thought of flushing them down the toilet but feared that they would clog the drain. With a hammer, I might crush the beads. But I had no idea of how hard amber might be. Besides the noise was prohibitive. At last I went to the window and, acting on hysterical impulse, flung the necklace as far as I could into the night.

As soon as it had disappeared, I recognized my folly. I stood in the window with the cold air swirling about me. Tomorrow I must rise early, find the beads and toss them into the river. I turned away and a new fear struck at me. What if the boy had left another clue hidden in my room? A second piece of jewelry? A bloodstained knife? In a panic, I started to pull out the drawers of the bureau. I went through each drawer, then I searched the closet, the desk, beneath the bed. When I had explored every conceivable hiding place, I started all over again. The obsessive search lasted for more than an hour and I found nothing. I turned off the light, and fully dressed, threw myself on the bed. Even if I could have slept, I dared not. I must be awake when light came. I must take no chances on someone stumbling across the beads.

In the morning I rid myself of the necklace as planned. But my ordeal had just begun. The weeks which followed still have the quality of a nightmare in which one recalls the sense of horror and humiliation with skin-prickling clarity but in which the details are obscured. I attended classes, studied, ate and sometimes slept. The only overt changes in my program were that I gave up my nightly walks and I ceased sharing late snacks with Mrs. Farnsworth. The latter

was not of my choosing. She no longer sought my company.

I knew why. On the day following my visit to the police station, Benson searched my room and questioned her. The nature of his queries must have aroused her suspicions. From then on she avoided me when possible and, when she did bring herself to face me, the incipient panic was obvious in her guarded speech and evasive eyes. I think she would have asked me to vacate my room except that she lacked the courage to do so.

The Phantom made no more raids and news of him disappeared from the paper as though by a miracle. But Benson was everywhere. Through round-about channels I learned that he had discussed me with the dean, several of my professors and a score of fellow students. He never made an open accusation but he made it amply clear that I was a suspect in the slaying of Margaret Sorenson.

Wherever I went I was an object of curiosity. Groups of students broke off their gay chatter to stare at me, only to drop their eyes if I looked in their direction. Even faculty members were stiff-backed or embarrassed in my presence. No defense was possible because no charge had been leveled against me. So I walked alone except for the shadow of the boy that was always with me.

Fortunately the end of the term was not far away and I managed to stick it out. But when I left for the summer holidays it was with the determination that I would not return. My first thought had been to transfer to another college but circumstances altered my plans. My mother died that summer and instead of the modest legacy I had expected, she left only debts. Then, quite unexpectedly, a minor editorial post was offered me on one of the avant-garde magazines that constantly spring into brief precarious life, only to close their pages for good at the end of a few months. Despite the small salary, I jumped at the opportunity, convinced in my ignorance that I had mounted the first hurdle to editorial recognition and literary success. More than that, the job would take me to New York. Surely, I assured myself, the boy would not dare to follow me there and, even if he did, he could not track me down among the city's millions.

Like many another literary aspirant, I found quarters on the fringe of Greenwich Village. My first few months in New York were busy and relatively happy. Even when the collapse of the magazine appeared inevitable, a group of us banded together for a last ditch stand, sharing our limited resources, swearing eternal loyalty to one another. But when the magazine finally did close, my newly-found friends drifted away one by one. Soon I found myself alone in a city in which I was still a stranger.

I made a futile round of the publishing houses in search of work and then, in desperation, took whatever job came to hand. For awhile I was counter-man at an all-night cafeteria and later a night clerk in a sleazy mid-town hotel but bad luck and ill health dogged me. I could keep none of the jobs for long.

My first winter in New York was hard enough but the second was filled with despair. My shabby room was unheated except for a gas burner and often I went through the day without food. I no longer sought regular work but eked out an existence through unemployment insurance and occasional part time jobs, spending most of my money on doctor's fees and medicines. I renewed my old habit of prowling the streets at night. I would pick my way through the crooked streets of the Village and wander into the business districts. The wholesale houses, closed and barred, their windows great sightless eyes, fitted my mood of dejection. So did the gaunt empty office buildings, the streets denuded of their teeming daytime life. I was dramatizing my misfortune. I willingly admit that. But this I swear: despite what the police have charged, I harmed no one on these nightly rambles. No one but myself.

It was on my return from one of these walks that I thought I saw the boy again. But I can't be sure even now that it was he. I was passing the corner of Tenth Street where it forms an angle at the rear of the Women's Home of Detention. A figure moved through the arc of yellow light cast by a street lamp, then faded into the shadows beyond. I caught only a glimpse of the thin shoulders, the head cocked a little to one side, the brittle poise of the lithe body. Yet at the moment I had no doubt. Instinctively I called and started toward him. A blur of movement and the crackle of grit beneath shoes betrayed a presence in the darkness, but then the figure was gone, swallowed up in shadow. I paced the block searching out each hiding place, but I could find no further trace of him.

Christmas Eve was bad. I was broke. I jingled the quarter and the two pennies in my pants pocket and wondered how I'd meet the rent on Monday. As on other nights, I carried my loneliness into the streets. I skittered away from the groups of singers, the holiday revellers who had swarmed into the Village. My loneliness was all I had to mark me as an individual. I cherished it and, hunching my shoulders against the cold wind, I sought out the darkest of streets, the dreariest of the city's backwaters.

The bells started to toll midnight as I unlocked the door of my room. Bursts of cheering from the street greeted the beginning of Christmas Day. From a nightclub nearby came the cacophony of drunken singing.

Perhaps these distractions were what made me so slow to note another presence in the room. My first warning was the scent of fresh tobacco. I stiffened and my hand froze in mid-air as I reached for the switch.

"We don't need no light, Nick. Just leave things like they are."

I recognized the voice but I could not see the boy until he rose from the battered deep-winged easy chair and was silhouetted against the fuzzy pink light thrown against the window by the neon signs of a Chinese restaurant.

I remained motionless, my anger mixed with an irrational sense of relief as though something I had been waiting for had happened at long last.

"How'd you get in?"

"A snap. You ought to change your lock. That one's as easy to pick as a sardine tin."

When I said nothing, he added, "Come on in and grab yourself a chair. My home is your home. Ain't that right, Nick?"

I said stiffly, "What are you doing here?"

"It's Christmas Eve, kid. Time for old buddies to get together. Ain't you glad to see me?"

I was feeling light-headed, on the verge of hysteria. I couldn't hold back a burble of laughter. "Crazy as it sounds, maybe I am."

"Sure you are. And don't think I come empty-handed. I brung along a bottle, a carton of fags. If I'd known how empty the joint was I would've brung some chow too. Looks like you been doin' heavy time, kid."

I crossed to the window and sat down in the dilapidated chair opposite his.

"That's my boy," he said. "Take a load off your feet. Pour yourself a drink. Light a fag. It's Christmas. You and me got to celebrate."

On the table beside him was an uncapped bottle, glasses, a pack of cigarettes. I poured a drink and gulped it fast. The raw whiskey rasped my throat but it took away some of the cold and the drifting fear. I settled back on the chair and dragged deep of a cigarette. It was the first I'd had in days and nothing had ever tasted so good.

I watched the boy's face in the flickering pink light. He was a man now but I'd always think of him as a boy, even when the rosy glow changed his face into a saturnine mask.

"Some dump you got, Nick. I'd expect better from a guy like you. A kid from the right side of the tracks. A stud with all the advantages."

"Nobody asked you here. If you don't like it, you can get out."

"That's no way to talk to an old pal. Anyway this pad is plenty good enough for me. All I want's a place to grab a little kip. In the morning I'll be gone like the wind."

"Why not try a hotel?"

He guffawed. "Always the joker,

kid. You're really a riot. I'll let you in on a secret. I'm hot. I mean really hot. The cops are practically glued to my tail."

He leaned over, filled my glass and flipped a pack of cigarettes in my lap. I drained my drink and felt a warm drowsiness creeping over me. There was a long silence and when I looked up at the boy, he sprawled on the chair so still that I thought he must be asleep.

His voice came to me, lazy, taunting. "Don't get no ideas about calling the cops, Nick. You try anything on me and I'll put it back on you double. You ought to know by this time. Me and you we look a lot alike. Maybe the cops would settle for you."

I didn't answer but got up and walked unsteadily to the bed. I crumpled up on it, cushioned my head with my curled arm and slept.

When I awakened it was nearly noon. Groggily I tried to sort out the events of the night, separating truth from fantasy. The room was empty but when I stumbled to the window, there was plenty of proof that the boy had been there. The bottle on the table still held a few fingers of whiskey. Cigarette butts were strewn in the glass ash-trays and a loose heap of unopened cigarette packs lay by the foot of the chair.

I picked up the used glasses and carried them to the alcove that doubled as bathroom and kitchenette. I pushed aside the screen and stopped in surprise. The glasses crashed to the floor. I paid no attention but stepped to the sink and reached toward the shining pile that lay on the corrugated plastic drainer. I examined the objects one by one. A woman's wristwatch set with stones that could be diamonds. Pendant earrings that looked like jade, brooches, a necklace glittering in the light. Precious gems or junk jewelry? I couldn't be sure. But I knew how they got there and why. Like the amber beads at college, the jewelry was a threat, a warning that the boy could frame me at will, that I was the perfect patsy, the fall guy.

I knew what I ought to do: wrap up the jewelry, take it to the street, thrust it into a trash basket or drain. I reached for a brown paper sack, then straightened up. When you're broke you don't throw away jewelry, not even if it's junk. At a pawn-shop I'd get enough to pay for my rent and to eat for a few days. I took the jewelry back to the front room and looked for a hiding place. In the end I pushed it down behind the cushion of the battered chair where the boy had sat the night before.

All day I waited for the boy, half hoping, half fearing that he would return. I finished the whiskey that remained in the bottle and worked my way through three packs of cigarettes. I was restless and kept turning toward the window. Toward nightfall it began to snow,

great feathery flakes that made me think of the first time I had met the boy.

At length my restlessness could be contained no longer. Slipping on a black leather jacket and a cap, I hurried to the street. At a drugstore I spent my quarter on a bowl of soup, then headed into the night again. The snow had changed to a wet sleet that stung my face. I walked head down into the storm, my hands thrust into my pockets, the fingers of one curled about the two pennies that formed my total capital.

I did not need to seek for desolate spots. The storm had swept the streets of life. The windows of the houses which I passed formed bizarre patterns of light but the light seemed to be sucked inward, unable to penetrate the barrier of sleet. I do not know how long I walked or the path I took. I only know that the streets were alien, that I had never walked them before.

I stopped suddenly. In the midst of the storm a sharp cry had risen, then broken off abruptly. Not the screech of the wind but a human voice. My head jerked up and I heard the voice again, gibbering in terror. I peered along the dark street and saw nothing. Momentarily I thought I had been deluded by the storm. Then in the strip of darkness that marked an areaway, I saw moving shadows, two men locked together in a death struggle.

As I rushed forward the figures separated. One took a dozen staggering steps toward a pool of light that seeped through a glass doorway. He lurched to one side, caught an iron balustrade with his hand, tottered and fell to one knee. He tried to pull himself upward, lost his balance and rolled over on his back.

I skidded to a stop before the fallen man. I knelt beside him just long enough to glimpse the seamed old face, with its open mouth and staring eyes. Already the sleet was crusting the skin, changing the face into a death mask. The man's coat had been ripped open and sunk deep into the flesh of his throat was a switchblade, its shining handle still quivering.

I glanced upward and saw that the second figure still remained in the shadows. As I watched he backed further into the darkness between the buildings until he found a recessed doorway. He crouched there, all but invisible, blending into the patch of black shadow.

I lunged at him, screaming, but as I reached for him, he twisted away. I nearly fell but caught myself against the frame of the doorway.

Out of the darkness the boy's voice spoke to me. He said, softly, "Cool off, man. You're in this too. Nobody's going to believe different."

I could see him now, the crook of his head, his luminous eyes. My

arm swept back to strike him but some superstitious dread stayed the blow.

He thrust something toward me. "Don't be a fool," he whispered. "The old man was loaded. There's plenty for both of us."

Dimly I could see his hand, the wallet he held there, the riffle of bills at its edge.

"No," I screamed and leaned forward to grapple with him. But my hands could find no grip on the ice-encrusted leather of his jacket. His knee came up, catching me in the pit of the stomach. As I gasped with pain and doubled over, he slid past me and was running along the dark canyon of the street. I raced after him and was almost upon him, when he swung around and threw something in my face.

Automatically my arm raised to protect my eyes. Something soft brushed my finger tips. I broke stride and my legs shot out from under me. I fell, heavily, awkwardly, my head grazing the wall of the building. For an instant pain ripped through me, then was wiped out by an enveloping darkness.

Consciousness returned slowly. Rough hands were jerking me to my feet. I protested feebly and was slammed against the wall. A flashlight probed my face, blinding me. A hand came out of the darkness, jolting my head backward.

I tried to shake myself free but the grip on my arm would not loosen. I blinked up into the face of a cop.

I shook my head, trying to clear it. "Find the boy," I cried. "He knifed the old man."

"Sure-sure. And you just happened along."

"Yes. You have to believe me."

The cop grinned and pointed to the sidewalk at my feet. A wallet lay there, a half dozen bills spread out about it.

"You want to change your story?"

"There was another boy—a man."

"He's lying." The voice was that of a woman who had come up behind the cop. "I was watching from my window. I saw him lean over the old man. I saw him take the wallet and run."

"She's right. There was only one." A man had taken up the chorus.

I struggled to free myself. "No, no," I shouted. "You're all lying."

But even then I knew that they were telling the truth as it seemed to them. The boy had never left the shadows. I was the only one whom they had seen.

This is the end of my story. I need not repeat the evidence against me. Of course, the police found the jewelry secreted in my room. They learned that I was broke and desperate with only two cents to my name. They dug up my past history and they did not believe in the boy.

I had no money, so the court

appointed two attorneys for my defense. I begged them to hunt for the boy but they had no funds for such a search. Anyway I do not think they believed in the boy's existence. Instead they brought a psychiatrist to see me and listen to what I had to say. He did not believe me either. He talked about dual personalities and extension of the ego, until he convinced himself that the boy was a figment of my imagination. He recommended that I plead temporary insanity. I refused.

My lawyers advised me not to take the witness stand at my trial. Again I refused. I insisted on my right to come here today and to tell the truth to you, the men and women who form the jury upon whom my fate rests.

I swear to you that the boy is real and that it was he who killed the old man whose name I have since learned was Anton Halz.

I am neither a thief nor a murderer.

Is there not one among you who will believe me?

NEXT MONTH—

TOO MANY WOMEN by GEORGE HARMON COXE

TWO AGAINST THE TERROR by CORNELL WOOLRICH

THE WATCHERS AT THE GATES
by GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

BEZIQUE OF DEATH by VERONICA PARKER JOHNS

THE SAINT IN MODERN ART by JEAN COCTEAU

THE UNCERTAIN WIDOW by LESLIE CHARTERIS

and

A MEDAL FOR DON CARLOS

A NEW STORY by RICHARD DEMING

-in the July issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

a lei for aloha

by . . . Juanita Sheridan

THAT SUNDAY had been a pleasant, typically relaxed Honolulu afternoon. While we women admired Evelyn's trousseau the men kidded Bob briefly about the honeymoon, then reverted to favorite local topics—business and Island politics. Eventually we drifted out to the lanai, which from the hillside looks far across roofs and trees to the Pacific creaming over the reef at Waikiki. Evelyn served drinks and we settled to idle predinner conversation.

Then the cablegram came.

Evelyn took the yellow envelope from the maid with a half-frightened look, and the rest of us politely pretended not to stare as she read the message.

All except Bob, who was immediately concerned. "Anything wrong, dear?"

"Oh, no! It's good news." She looked at him with a bright, fixed smile. "Rita's coming home. She'll be here in time for our wedding."

"Rita!" He reached toward the paper in her hand. "What does she say?"

Evelyn folded the message and put it back in the envelope. "This

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There was a warmth and an obvious affection for the peoples and the area about which she wrote which made Juanita Sheridan's novels, then published by the Crime Club, unique in a field where it is recognized that the stereotype is so much the safer. This is Miss Sheridan's first appearance in these pages. We hope it is not the last.

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is from my sister Helen. She just says Rita left yesterday."

But I saw panic in Evelyn's blue eyes as she turned away and fumbled a cigarette out of the package on the table. The group relaxed into chatter again, and no one else seemed to notice how distressed she was. As a neighbor and old friend, I made an excuse to linger and, after the last guest had gone, Evelyn handed me the message.

RITA LEFT YESTERDAY ARRIVES LURLINE NEXT WEEK WARNING POSSIBLE PILIKIA HELEN.

"'*Warning possible pilikia*'? What's this about, Ev? What kind of trouble?"

"It's an old story," Evelyn said with a forlorn little shrug. "Probably everyone in Honolulu knows it except you. Bob and Rita were engaged last winter, while you were in Japan. Then Rita met Jerry Fielding at Waikiki—you know, the chain store Fieldings—and he gave her a terrific rush. As soon as he left, she staged a big fight with Bob and told him she thought their engagement was a mistake. Then she took off for Philadelphia to visit the Fielding family."

"And your sister Helen kept in touch with her on the mainland?"

"Yes. Helen wrote me the details. It seems that the Fieldings didn't take to Rita very well. She stuck it out as long as she possibly could."

"So, after she left Bob, you picked up the pieces?"

"I'd be a fool to nurse wounded pride, wouldn't I?" she said humbly. "There's never been anyone for me except Bob since we were in fifth grade together. But now Rita's coming home. She'll stop at nothing to get him back. And this time, once she gets her clutches on Bob again, I won't have a chance—"

"But Ev, you don't want a man who's in love with another girl, do you?"

"He was never in love with her, really. Rita generates excitement; it was one of those feverish infatuations. And she certainly doesn't love him; Bob just happens to be the best catch of all the local retinue she's had. But if she gets an opportunity to work on his sympathy, make a few scenes—there's nothing he hates worse—she might persuade him he was the one who jilted her."

"Can't you do something about it?"

"What, for instance? She's my cousin. I'll have to meet her next week, along with the rest of the family. And she'll ignore me as usual, and head straight for Bob with that allure working like a dynamo. She'll kiss him, whisper how much she's missed him, and act as if she doesn't know a thing about our engagement, while all I can do is stand helplessly by and watch—"

Her voice trembled and her eyes filled with tears. I felt sorry for her. "It seems to me, Ev, your only defense is to operate as unscrupulously as she does."

"Maybe you're right. But I can't," she said miserably. "I just don't have that kind of ruthlessness in me—and Rita knows it."

She hesitated, then said, "Here's an example, something I've never told anyone else in Honolulu: When Rita and I were roommates in college on the mainland I was chosen queen of the campus, and she was jealous. She showed me where to pick ivy vines to wear in the pageant—only it was poison ivy. I spent ten days in the infirmary, and instead of being queen, I was the joke of the campus. Rita took my place in the pageant."

"But didn't the school authorities—"

"She would have been expelled, and Rita's my cousin, after all. I didn't say anything. The only person besides you who knows about it is my sister Helen."

I must have gaped at Evelyn. Such strong loyalty—even this misdirected variety—is seldom encountered in the young these days. She would have made a good wife for Bob, I thought, then caught myself—*would have?* For a moment I wavered in my long-established habit of letting friends, of all ages and degrees of wisdom, work out their own problems. I went home thinking gloomily that whatever he committed himself to in the future, Bob, who couldn't face a scene, was going to deserve everything he got.

We were all there when the Lurline docked the following Wednesday, twelve of us, with traditional welcome for Rita. There was the usual shipside crowd, shoving goodnaturedly, complaining of the heat, standing tiptoe to shout *alohas* to relatives or friends at the rail. The band played our timeless, beautiful *Na Lei o Hawaii,* there was the typical smell of roast coffee and pineapple bran and flowers.

Bob and Evelyn arrived late and I observed that she wore a new blue linen frock and would have looked very pretty if her eyes hadn't been so red. She brought wreaths of pink *plumeria* and carnation. I did a double take when I saw that Bob carried a florist's box. Here in Hawaii, *leis* from a florist mean you care enough about the recipient to have a special order made up—at five times the street vendors' price. It seemed to me that Bob wore a rather sheepish grin on his face. Maybe, I thought, Evelyn would be well rid of a man so gullible as that.

When Rita stepped off the gangplank he was first to reach her with two lovely *leis*: one of feathery yellow ginger and the other our traditional orange *ilima* with fragrant *maile* leaves twisted around

it. He grabbed Rita and kissed her, then draped his *leis* around her smooth, bare neck. The rest of us followed suit, until she was chin-deep in flowers.

Rita looked stunning in white, of course it was the perfect background for our floral *aloha.* Rita's black hair was gamine-cut, her tanned skin was flawless, she wore raspberry lipstick. She had more aplomb than ten average women, flashing her 10,000-watt smile at us over the flowers.

"It's heavenly to be home! Philadelphia was frightful—such a dull place, I don't see how people endure living there. So marvelous to see the Islands again! And Bob, *darling!*" Her voice dropped an octave: "Let me have a look! Oh, it's wonderful to see *you* again!"

She clung to him every step of the way to the car. She maneuvered him into the front seat beside her, while Evelyn trailed silently along and climbed into the rear with me. As we drove to Rita's house in Manoa, I heard her urging Bob to stop by later in the afternoon, murmuring that she just had to see him alone. Bob stammered something about having a lot of work to finish in his law office, and I came to his relief by chirping loudly that Rita had arrived just in time for the wedding.

"What wedding?" It was beautifully simulated. No doubt she could have garrotted me for mentioning it so soon.

"Haven't you heard?" I trilled. "But of course, you've been five thousand miles away. Bob and Evelyn are being married next week."

"How exciting! Congratulations, both of you! All the more reason for celebrating tonight. Come over for drinks about eight, we'll go on from there to the Beachcombers."

I was watching that front seat. I saw Bob start, and guessed that Rita had clutched his arm. I leaned forward to brush some dust from my white pumps and heard her whisper in a heart-breaking tremolo, "Bob, oh, *darling*—is that really true?"

I leaned back with a feeling of sickish apprehension. Evelyn's eyes met mine, then she turned to look at the window, her lips tight together. We were thinking the same thing. We both knew that Rita would manage somehow to reach Bob early, would get him to her house on some pretext. And poor, vulnerable Bob would go, just to give her a chance to apologize, to cling to him and shed a few lovely tears—and possibly start the whole misbegotten affair all over again.

But we didn't see Rita that night. She called to say she wasn't well and intended to go to bed early. Over the telephone she sounded more furious than ill. Nor did she appear the next night at the dinner party I gave for the engaged couple. Her mother answered when

I called to invite her, and said Rita was resting after the trip. Which of course was ridiculous, since there is hardly anything more restful than a crossing on the Lurline.

Rita didn't even show up for the ceremony, which went off splendidly according to schedule. There was comment at the reception; quite a few people remarked that it was really unforgivably rude of Rita not to go to her own cousin's wedding.

Bob and Evelyn honeymooned at the Volcano House. Shortly after they returned, Evelyn asked me to lunch with her and then go to Grossman-Moody's to look at fabrics. The moment we were seated at the table I burst out: "For heaven's sake, Evelyn, stop babbling about furniture for one minute and tell me. I'm dying to know."

Evelyn's smile was dreamy. She twisted the jeweled circle on her finger and said, "To know what?"

"How you managed it, of course. You must be a *kahuna*. What kind of spell did you put on your beautiful cousin?"

She looked at me blankly. "Why, nothing. Honestly, I didn't do a thing." Then she brightened. "Did you see the wedding gift the Farnhams sent us from Maui? The most beautiful *koa* salad bowl, it's simply huge, with a lovely tray to match—"

My mind raced while she went on talking about her new house, and didn't Bob look splendid after their trip to the Big Island, and there was a rose quartz lamp she'd seen at Gumps, and wasn't Bob the most wonderful. . . .

After I left Evelyn that afternoon I went to see Bob. It was almost four and he was just ready to leave his office. He said he'd drive me home and on the way we stopped for a drink at the Moana. We sat in the Banyan Court and watched surfers far out on the blue water waiting for a big one and tourists cavorting on the beach closer by, until the waiter set two tall frosted glasses before us. While we waited I took a good look at Evelyn's husband. He wasn't so wonderful, just a nice, sweet, easy-going guy.

He met my scrutiny with a bland smile. "You and Evelyn find any stuff you liked?"

"Yards and yards. But that's not what I want to talk to you about."

"All right," he said mildly. "Go ahead and talk. What's on your mind?"

"What's on my mind is this mystery. Evelyn told me today she knows absolutely nothing about whatever it was that happened to Rita. I believe her. But somebody on this island knows. Bob, could it by any chance be you?"

He lit my cigarette, then his own. He looked directly into my eyes, and that regard, charged with cool intelligence, gave me a jolt.

"It could be," he admitted suc-

cinctly. What had happened to that familiar, easy going voice? "Could be—and is. Or was, rather. I'm the one who gave Rita the kind of *aloha* she deserved."

"How did you do it? I'm completely delighted, you know that. But I'll not sleep until I find out."

"Simple," he said. "Remember the special *leis* I brought? Remember that one was *ilima* and *maile?*"

"Ye-e-e-s," I said.

"Evelyn thought her sister was the only one who knew that story about how Rita made her the joke of the campus. But Helen told me. You understand, Rita's coming back didn't bother me a bit. But she loves to dramatize situations, and this makes her nuisance potential pretty high. Evelyn was worried. I couldn't let Rita spoil anything more for Evelyn. So I ordered a *lei* made of *ilima* and *maile* vine. I carried my *leis* in a box until I could give them to Rita."

"But—" I gasped. "There's no poison ivy in Hawaii."

"There's plenty on the mainland. I made a trans-Pacific call to Helen, after her cable saying Rita was coming back. She sent me the stuff by airmail; it arrived the night before the Lurline docked. I had the *lei* made and then added my own little touches—I used coconut oil on my hands—to the *maile* vine."

"That's why you rushed to get to Rita first, so the other flowers would cover it up." I finished my drink, and the glow I felt derived from something more than a collins. Finally I said, "Bob, I must agree with your adoring wife. You are a pretty remarkable person."

"Not at all," he said. "Just a simple fellow who hates a fuss." Then he grinned at me. "But if Evelyn wants to think I'm wonderful, let's not disillusion her, shall we?"

NEXT MONTH—

AS A BRIGAND OF SORTS HIMSELF — THE SAINT WAS SOMEWHAT OF AN AUTHORITY ON BANDITS. BUT THIS ONE WAS DIFFERENT —

in

THE UNCERTAIN WIDOW

A SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

-in the July issue of THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

the anthropologist at large

by . . . R. Austin Freeman

THORNDYKE was not a newspaper reader. He viewed with extreme disfavor all scrappy and miscellaneous forms of literature, which, by presenting a disorderly series of unrelated items of information, tended, as he considered, to destroy the habit of consecutive mental effort.

"It is most important," he once remarked to me, "habitually to pursue a definite train of thought, and to pursue it to a finish, instead of flitting indolently from one uncompleted topic to another, as the newspaper reader is so apt to do. Still, there is no harm in a daily paper—so long as you don't read it."

Accordingly, he patronized a morning paper, and his method of dealing with it was characteristic. The paper was laid on the table after breakfast, together with a blue pencil and a pair of office shears. A preliminary glance through the sheets enabled him to mark with the pencil those paragraphs that

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Without Africa and the blackwater fever there would have been no Dr. Thorndyke. Invalided home in 1892 as unfit for further service in West Africa, after serving on the Gold Coast and as a member of the Anglo-German Boundary Commission for Togoland, Dr. Freeman practiced medicine in England for several years and served as Deputy Medical Officer of Holloway Prison, before turning to writing. In each of the Thorndyke books, a particular problem in Medical Jurisprudence is worked out. The cases are fictitious, but the medico-legal facts Freeman cites are very very real.

From: DR. THORNDYKE'S CASES, by R. Austin Freeman. (1931, Dodd Mead)
Reprinted by permission of Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc.

were to be read, and these were presently cut out and looked through, after which they were either thrown away or set aside to be pasted in an indexed book.

The whole proceeding occupied, on an average, a quarter of an hour.

On the morning of which I am now speaking he was thus engaged. The pencil had done its work, and the snick of the shears announced the final stage. Presently he paused with a newly-excised cutting between his fingers, and, after glancing at it for a moment, he handed it to me.

"Another art robbery," he remarked. "Mysterious affairs, these —as to motive, I mean. You can't melt down a picture or an ivory carving, and you can't put them on the market as they stand. The very qualities that give them their value make them totally unnegotiable."

"Yet I suppose," said I, "the really inveterate collector—the pottery or stamp maniac, for instance—will buy these contraband goods even though he dare not show them."

"Probably. No doubt the *cupiditas habendi*, the mere desire to p[illegible]s, is the motive force rather than any intelligent purpose ——"

The discussion was at this point interrupted by a knock at the door, and a moment later my colleague admitted two gentlemen. One of these I recognized as a Mr. Marchmont, a solicitor, for whom we had occasionally acted; the other was a stranger—good-looking, faultlessly dressed, carrying a bandbox, and obviously in a state of the most extreme agitation.

"Good-morning to you, gentlemen," said Mr. Marchmont, shaking hands cordially. "I have brought a client of mine to see you, and when I tell you that his name is Solomon Löwe, it will be unnecessary for me to say what our business is."

"Oddly enough," replied Thorndyke, "we were, at the very moment when you knocked, discussing the bearings of his case."

"It is a horrible affair!" burst in Mr. Löwe. "I am distracted! I am ruined! I am in despair!"

He banged the bandbox down on the table, and flinging himself into a chair, buried his face in his hands.

"Come, come," remonstrated Marchmont, "we must be brave, we must be composed. Tell Dr. Thorndyke your story, and let us hear what he thinks of it."

He leaned back in his chair, and looked at his client with that air of patient fortitude that comes to us all so easily when we contemplate the misfortunes of other people.

"You must help us, sir," exclaimed Löwe, starting up again—"you must, indeed, or I shall go mad. But I shall tell you what has happened, and then you must act at once. Spare no effort and no expense. Money is no object—at least,

not in reason," he added, with caution. He sat down once more, and in perfect English, though with a slight German accent, proceeded volubly: "My brother Isaac is probably known to you by name."

Thorndyke nodded.

"He is a great collector, and to some extent a dealer—that is to say, he makes his hobby a profitable hobby."

"What does he collect?" asked Thorndyke.

"Everything," replied our visitor, flinging his hands apart with a comprehensive gesture — "everything that is precious and beautiful —pictures, ivories, jewels, watches, objects of art and *vertu*—everything. He is a Jew, and he has that passion for things that are rich and costly that has distinguished our race from the time of my namesake Solomon onwards. His house in Howard Street, Piccadilly, is at once a museum and an art gallery. The rooms are filled with cases of gems, of antique jewellery, of coins and historic relics—some of priceless value—and the walls are covered with paintings, every one of which is a masterpiece. There is a fine collection of ancient weapons and armor, both European and Oriental; rare books, manuscripts, papyri, and valuable antiquities from Egypt, Assyria, Cyprus, and elsewhere. You see, his taste is quite catholic, and his knowledge of rare and curious things is probably greater than that of any other living man. He is never mistaken. No forgery deceives him, and hence the great prices that he obtains; for a work of art purchased from Isaac Löwe is a work certified as genuine beyond all cavil."

He paused to mop his face with a silk handkerchief, and then, with the same plaintive volubility, continued:

"My brother is unmarried. He lives for his collection, and he lives with it. The house is not a very large one, and the collection takes up most of it; but he keeps a suite of rooms for his own occupation, and has two servants—a man and wife—to look after him. The man, who is a retired police-sergeant, acts as caretaker and watchman; the woman as housekeeper and cook, if required, but my brother lives largely at his club. And now I come to this present catastrophe."

He ran his fingers through his hair, took a deep breath, and continued:

"Yesterday morning Isaac started for Florence by way of Paris, but his route was not certain, and he intended to break his journey at various points as circumstances determined. Before leaving, he put his collection in my charge, and it was arranged that I should occupy his rooms in his absence. Accordingly, I sent my things round and took possession.

"Now, Dr. Thorndyke, I am closely connected with the drama, and it is my custom to spend my

evenings at my club, of which most of the members are actors. Consequently, I am rather late in my habits; but last night I was earlier than usual in leaving my club, for I started for my brother's house before half-past twelve. I felt, as you may suppose, the responsibility of the great charge I had undertaken; and you may, therefore, imagine my horror, my consternation, my despair, when, on letting myself in with my latchkey, I found a police-inspector, a sergeant, and a constable in the hall. There had been a robbery, sir, in my brief absence, and the account that the inspector gave of the affair was briefly this:

"While taking the round of his district, he had noticed an empty hansom proceeding in leisurely fashion along Howard Street. There was nothing remarkable in this, but when, about ten minutes later, he was returning, and met a hansom, which he believed to be the same, proceeding along the same street in the same direction, and at the same easy pace, the circumstance struck him as odd, and he made a note of the number of the cab in his pocket-book. It was 72,863, and the time was 11:35.

"At 11:45 a constable coming up Howard Street noticed a hansom standing opposite the door of my brother's house, and, while he was looking at it, a man came out of the house carrying something, which he put in the cab. On this the constable quickened his pace, and when the man returned to the house and reappeared carrying what looked like a portmanteau, and closing the door softly behind him, the policeman's suspicions were aroused, and he hurried forward, hailing the cabman to stop.

"The man put his burden into the cab, and sprang in himself. The cabman lashed his horse, which started off at a gallop, and the policeman broke into a run, blowing his whistle and flashing his lantern on to the cab. He followed it round the two turnings into Albemarle Street, and was just in time to see it turn into Piccadilly, where, of course, it was lost. However, he managed to note the number of the cab, which was 72,863, and he describes the man as short and thick-set, and thinks he was not wearing any hat.

"As he was returning, he met the inspector and the sergeant, who had heard the whistle, and on his report the three officers hurried to the house, where they knocked and rang for some minutes without any result. Being now more than suspicious, they went to the back of the house, through the mews, where, with great difficulty, they managed to force a window and effect an entrance into the house.

"Here their suspicions were soon changed to certainty, for, on reaching the first-floor, they heard strange muffled groans proceeding from one of the rooms, the door

of which was locked, though the key had not been removed. They opened the door, and found the caretaker and his wife sitting on the floor, with their backs against the wall. Both were bound hand and foot, and the head of each was enveloped in a green-baize bag; and when the bags were taken off, each was found to be lightly but effectively gagged.

"Each told the same story. The caretaker, fancying he heard a noise, armed himself with a truncheon, and came downstairs to the first-floor, where he found the door of one of the rooms open, and a light burning inside. He stepped on tiptoe to the open door, and was peering in, when he was seized from behind, half suffocated by a pad held over his mouth, pinioned, gagged, and blindfolded with the bag.

"His assailant—whom he never saw—was amazingly strong and skilful, and handled him with perfect ease, although he—the caretaker—is a powerful man, and a good boxer and wrestler. The same thing happened to the wife, who had come down to look for her husband. She walked into the same trap, and was gagged, pinioned, and blindfolded without ever having seen the robber. So the only description that we have of this villain is that furnished by the constable."

"And the caretaker had no chance of using his truncheon?" said Thorndyke.

"Well, he got in one backhanded blow over his right shoulder, which he thinks caught the burglar in the face; but the fellow caught him by the elbow, and gave his arm such a twist that he dropped the truncheon on the floor."

"Is the robbery a very extensive one?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Löwe, "that is just what we cannot say. But I fear it is. It seems that my brother had quite recently drawn out of his bank four thousand pounds in notes and gold. These little transactions are often carried out in cash rather than by check"—here I caught a twinkle in Thorndyke's eye—"and the caretaker says that a few days ago Isaac brought home several parcels, which were put away temporarily in a strong cupboard. He seemed to be very pleased with his new acquisitions, and gave the caretaker to understand that they were of extraordinary rarity and value.

"Now, this cupboard has been cleared out. Not a vestige is left in it but the wrappings of the parcels, so, although nothing else has been touched, it is pretty clear that goods to the value of four thousand pounds have been taken; but when we consider what an excellent buyer my brother is, it becomes highly probable that the actual value of those things is two or three times that amount, or even more.

It is a dreadful, dreadful business, and Isaac will hold me responsible for it all."

"Is there no further clue?" asked Thorndyke. "What about the cab, for instance?"

"Oh, the cab," groaned Löwe—"that clue failed. The police must have mistaken the number. They telephoned immediately to all the police stations, and a watch was set, with the result that number 72,863 was stopped as it was going home for the night. But it then turned out that the cab had not been off the rank since eleven o'clock, and the driver had been in the shelter all the time with several other men. But there *is* a clue; I have it here."

Mr. Löwe's face brightened for once as he reached out for the bandbox.

"The houses in Howard Street," he explained, as he untied the fastening, "have small balconies to the first-floor windows at the back. Now, the thief entered by one of these windows, having climbed up a rain-water pipe to the balcony. It was a gusty night, as you will remember, and this morning, as I was leaving the house, the butler next door called to me and gave me this; he had found it lying in the balcony of his house."

He opened the bandbox with a flourish, and brought forth a rather shabby billycock hat.

"I understand," said he, "that by examining a hat it is possible to deduce from it, not only the bodily characteristics of the wearer, but also his mental and moral qualities, his state of health, his pecuniary position, his past history, and even his domestic relations and the peculiarities of his place of abode. Am I right in this supposition?"

The ghost of a smile flitted across Thorndyke's face as he laid the hat upon the remains of the newspaper. "We must not expect too much," he observed. "Hats, as you know, have a way of changing owners. Your own hat, for instance" (a very spruce, hard felt), "is a new one, I think."

"Got it last week," said Mr. Löwe.

"Exactly. It is an expensive hat, by Lincoln and Bennett, and I see you have judiciously written your name in indelible marking-ink on the lining. Now, a new hat suggests a discarded predecessor. What do you do with your old hats?"

"My man has them, but they don't fit him. I suppose he sells them or gives them away."

"Very well. Now, a good hat like yours has a long life, and remains serviceable long after it has become shabby; and the probability is that many of your hats pass from owner to owner; from you to the shabby-genteel, and from them to the shabby ungenteel. And it is a fair assumption that there are, at this moment, an appreciable number of tramps and casuals wearing hats by Lincoln and Bennett, marked in

indelible ink with the name S. Löwe; and anyone who should examine those hats, as you suggest, might draw some very misleading deductions as to the personal habits of S. Löwe."

Mr. Marchmont chuckled audibly, and then, remembering the gravity of the occasion, suddenly became portentously solemn.

"So you think that the hat is of no use, after all?" said Mr. Löwe, in a tone of deep disappointment.

"I won't say that," replied Thorndyke. "We may learn something from it. Leave it with me, at any rate; but you must let the police know that I have it. They will want to see it, of course."

"And you will try to get those things, won't you?" pleaded Löwe.

"I will think over the case. But you understand, or Mr. Marchmont does, that this is hardly in my province. I am a medical jurist, and this is not a medico-legal case."

"Just what I told him," said Marchmont. "But you will do me a great kindness if you will look into the matter. Make it a medico-legal case," he added persuasively.

Thorndyke repeated his promise, and the two men took their departure.

For some time after they had left, my colleague remained silent, regarding the hat with a quizzical smile. "It is like a game of forfeits," he remarked at length, "and we have to find the owner of 'this very pretty thing.'" He lifted it with a pair of forceps into a better light, and began to look at it more closely.

"Perhaps," said he, "we have done Mr. Löwe an injustice, after all. This is certainly a very remarkable hat."

"It is as round as a basin," I exclaimed. "Why, the fellow's head must have been turned in a lathe!"

Thorndyke laughed. "The point," said he, "is this. This is a hard hat, and so must have fitted fairly, or it could not have been worn; and it was a cheap hat, and so was not made to measure. But a man with a head that shape has got to come to a clear understanding with his hat. No ordinary hat would go on at all.

"Now, you see what he has done —no doubt on the advice of some friendly hatter. He has bought a hat of a suitable size, and he has made it hot—probably steamed it. Then he has jammed it, while still hot and soft, on to his head, and allowed it to cool and set before removing it. That is evident from the distortion of the brim. The important corollary is, that this hat fits his head exactly—is, in fact, a perfect mould of it; and this fact, together with the cheap quality of the hat, furnishes the further corollary that it has probably only had a single owner.

"And now let us turn it over and look at the outside. You notice at once the absence of old dust. Allowing for the circumstance that it had

been out all night, it is decidedly clean. Its owner has been in the habit of brushing it, and is therefore presumably a decent, orderly man. But if you look at it in a good light, you see a kind of bloom on the felt, and through this lens you can make out particles of a fine white powder which has worked into the surface."

He handed me his lens, through which I could distinctly see the particles to which he referred.

"Then," he continued, "under the curl of the brim and in the folds of the hatband, where the brush has not been able to reach it, the powder has collected quite thickly, and we can see that it is a very fine powder, and very white, like flour. What do you make of that?"

"I should say that it is connected with some industry. He may be engaged in some factory or works, or, at any rate, may live near a factory, and have to pass it frequently."

"Yes; and I think we can distinguish between the two possibilities. For, if he only passes the factory, the dust will be on the outside of the hat only; the inside will be protected by his head. But if he is engaged in the works, the dust will be inside, too, as the hat will hang on a peg in the dust-laden atmosphere, and his head will also be powdered, and so convey the dust to the inside."

He turned the hat over once more, and as I brought the powerful lens to bear upon the dark lining, I could clearly distinguish a number of white particles in the interstices of the fabric.

"The powder is on the inside, too," I said.

He took the lens from me, and, having verified my statement, proceeded with the examination. "You notice," he said, "that the leather head-lining is stained with grease, and this staining is more pronounced at the sides and back. His hair, therefore, is naturally greasy, or he greases it artificially; for if the staining were caused by perspiration, it would be most marked opposite the forehead."

He peered anxiously into the interior of the hat, and eventually turned down the head-lining; and immediately there broke out upon his face a gleam of satisfaction.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "This is a stroke of luck. I was afraid our neat and orderly friend had defeated us with his brush. Pass me the small dissecting forceps, Jervis."

I handed him the instrument, and he proceeded to pick out daintily from the space behind the head-lining some half a dozen short pieces of hair, which he laid, with infinite tenderness, on a sheet of white paper.

"There are several more on the other side," I said, pointing them out to him.

"Yes, but we must leave some for the police," he answered, with a

smile. "They must have the same chance as ourselves, you know."

"But surely," I said, as I bent down over the paper, "these are pieces of horsehair!"

"I think not," he replied; "but the microscope will show. At any rate, this is the kind of hair I should expect to find with a head of that shape."

"Well, it is extraordinarily coarse," said I, "and two of the hairs are nearly white."

"Yes; black hairs beginning to turn grey. And now, as our preliminary survey has given such encouraging results, we will proceed to more exact methods; and we must waste no time, for we shall have the police here presently to rob us of our treasure."

He folded up carefully the paper containing the hairs, and taking the hat in both hands, as though it were some sacred vessel, ascended with me to the laboratory on the next floor.

"Now, Polton," he said to his laboratory assistant, "we have here a specimen for examination, and time is precious. First of all, we want your patent dust-extractor."

The little man bustled to a cupboard and brought forth a singular appliance, of his own manufacture, somewhat like a miniature vacuum cleaner. It had been made from a bicycle foot-pump, by reversing the piston-valve, and was fitted with a glass nozzle and a small detachable glass receiver for collecting the dust, at the end of a flexible metal tube.

"We will sample the dust from the outside first," said Thorndyke, laying the hat upon the workbench. "Are you ready, Polton?"

The assistant slipped his foot into the stirrup of the pump and worked the handle vigorously, while Thorndyke drew the glass nozzle slowly along the hat-brim under the curled edge. And as the nozzle passed along, the white coating vanished as if by magic, leaving the felt absolutely clean and black, and simultaneously the glass receiver became clouded over with a white deposit.

"We will leave the other side for the police," said Thorndyke, and as Polton ceased pumping he detached the receiver, and laid it on a sheet of paper, on which he wrote in pencil, "Outside," and covered it with a small bell-glass. A fresh receiver having been fitted on, the nozzle was now drawn over the silk lining of the hat, and then through the space behind the leather head-lining on one side; and now the dust that collected in the receiver was much of the usual grey color and fluffy texture, and included two more hairs.

"And now," said Thorndyke, when the second receiver had been detached and set aside, "we want a mould of the inside of the hat, and we must make it by the quickest method; there is no time to make a paper mould. It is a most

astonishing head," he added, reaching down from a nail a pair of large callipers, which he applied to the inside of the hat; "six inches and nine-tenths long by six and six-tenths broad, which gives us"—he made a rapid calculation on a scrap of paper—"the extraordinary high cephalic index of 95.6."

Polton now took possession of the hat, and, having stuck a band of wet tissue-paper round the inside, mixed a small bowl of plaster of Paris, and very dexterously ran a stream of the thick liquid on to the tissue-paper, where it quickly solidified. A second and third application resulted in a broad ring of solid plaster an inch thick, forming a perfect mould of the inside of the hat, and in a few minutes the slight contraction of the plaster in setting rendered the mould sufficiently loose to allow of its being slipped out on to a board to dry.

We were none too soon, for even as Polton was removing the mould, the electric bell, which I had swtiched on to the laboratory, announced a visitor, and when I went down I found a police-sergeant waiting with a note from Superintendent Miller, requesting the immediate transfer of the hat.

"The next thing to be done," said Thorndyke, when the sergeant had departed with the bandbox, "is to measure the thickness of the hairs, and make a transverse section of one, and examine the dust. The section we will leave to Polton—as time is an object, Polton, you had better imbed the hair in thick gum and freeze it hard on the microtome, and be very careful to cut the section at right angles to the length of the hair—meanwhile, we will get to work with the microscope."

The hairs proved on measurement to have the surprisingly large diameter of 1/135 of an inch—fully double that of ordinary hairs, although they were unquestionably human. As to the white dust, it presented a problem that even Thorndyke was unable to solve. The application of reagents showed it to be carbonate of lime, but its source for a time remained a mystery.

"The larger particles," said Thorndyke, with his eye applied to the microscope, "appear to be transparent, crystalline, and distinctly laminated in structure. It is not chalk, it is not whiting, it is not any kind of cement. What can it be?"

"Could it be any kind of shell?" I suggested. "For instance—"

"Of course!" he exclaimed, starting up; "you have hit it, Jervis, as you always do. It must be mother-of-pearl. Polton, give me a pearl shirt-button out of your oddments box."

The button was duly produced by the thrifty Polton, dropped into an agate mortar, and speedily reduced to powder, a tiny pinch of

which Thorndyke placed under the microscope.

"This powder," said he, "is, naturally, much coarser than our specimen, but the identity of character is unmistakable. Jervis, you are a treasure. Just look at it."

I glanced down the microscope, and then pulled out my watch. "Yes," I said, "there is no doubt about it, I think; but I must be off. Anstey urged me to be in court by 11:30 at the latest."

With infinite reluctance I collected my notes and papers, and departed, leaving Thorndyke diligently copying addresses out of the Post Office Directory.

My business at the court detained me the whole of the day, and it was near upon dinner-time when I reached our chambers. Thorndyke had not yet come in, but he arrived half an hour later, tired and hungry, and not very communicative.

"What have I done?" he repeated, in answer to my inquiries. "I have walked miles of dirty pavement, and I have visited every pearl-shell cutter's in London, with one exception, and I have not found what I was looking for. The one mother-of-pearl factory that remains, however, is the most likely, and I propose to look in there tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, we have completed our data, with Polton's assistance. Here is a tracing of our friend's skull taken from the mould; you see it is an extreme type of brachycephalic skull; and markedly unsymmetrical. Here is a transverse section of his hair, which is quite circular—unlike yours or mine, which would be oval. We have the mother-of-pearl dust from the outside of the hat, and from the inside similar dust mixed with various fibres and a few granules of rice starch. Those are our data."

"Supposing the hat should not be that of the burglar after all?" I suggested.

"That would be annoying. But I think it is his, and I think I can guess at the nature of the art treasures that were stolen."

"And you don't intend to enlighten me?"

"My dear fellow," he replied, "you have all the data. Enlighten yourself by the exercise of your own brilliant faculties. Don't give way to mental indolence."

I endeavored, from the facts in my possession, to construct the personality of the mysterious burglar, and failed utterly; nor was I more successful in my endeavor to guess at the nature of the stolen property; and it was not until the following morning, when we had set out on our quest and were approaching Limehouse, that Thorndyke would revert to the subject.

"We are now," he said, "going to the factory of Badcomb and Martin, shell importers and cutters, in the West India Dock Road. If I don't find my man there, I shall

hand the facts over to the police, and waste no more time over the case."

"What is your man like?" I asked.

"I am looking for an elderly Japanese, wearing a new hat or, more probably, a cap, and having a bruise on his right cheek or temple. I am also looking for a cab-yard; but here we are at the works, and as it is now close on the dinner-hour, we will wait and see the hands come out before making any inquiries."

We walked slowly past the tall, blank-faced building, and were just turning to re-pass it when a steam whistle sounded, a wicket opened in the main gate, and a stream of workmen—each powdered with white, like a miller—emerged into the street. We halted to watch the men as they came out, one by one, through the wicket, and turned to the right or left towards their homes or some adjacent coffee-shop; but none of them answered to the description that my friend had given.

The outcoming stream grew thinner, and at length ceased; the wicket was shut with a bang, and once more Thorndyke's quest appeared to have failed.

"Is that all of them, I wonder?" he said, with a shade of dissappointment in his tone; but even as he spoke the wicket opened again, and a leg protruded. The leg was followed by a back and a curious globular head, covered with iron-grey hair, and surmounted by a cloth cap, the whole appertaining to a short, very thick-set man, who remained thus, evidently talking to someone inside.

Suddenly he turned his head to look across the street; and immediately I recognized, by the pallid yellow complexion and narrow eye-slits, the physiognomy of a typical Japanese. The man remained talking for nearly another minute; then, drawing out his other leg, he turned towards us; and now I perceived that the right side of his face, over the prominent cheek-bone, was discolored as though by a severe bruise.

"Ha!" said Thorndyke, turning round sharply as the man approached, "either this is our man or it is an incredible coincidence." He walked away at a moderate pace, allowing the Japanese to overtake us slowly, and when the man had at length passed us, he increased his speed somewhat, so as to maintain the distance.

Our friend stepped along briskly, and presently turned up a side street, whither we followed at a respectful distance, Thorndyke holding open his pocket-book, and appearing to engage me in an earnest discussion, but keeping a sharp eye on his quarry.

"There he goes!" said my colleague, as the man suddenly disappeared—"the house with the green

window-sashes. That will be number thirteen."

It was; and, having verified the fact, we passed on, and took the next turning that would lead us back to the main road.

Some twenty minutes later, as we were strolling past the door of a coffee-shop, a man came out, and began to fill his pipe with an air of leisurely satisfaction. His hat and clothes were powdered with white like those of the workmen whom we had seen come out of the factory. Thorndyke accosted him.

"Is that a flour-mill up the road there?"

"No, sir; pearl-shell. I work there myself."

"Pearl-shell, eh?" said Thorndyke. "I suppose that will be an industry that will tend to attract the aliens. Do you find it so?"

"No, sir; not at all. The work's too hard. We've only got one foreigner in the place, and he ain't an alien—he's a Jap."

"A Jap!" exclaimed Thorndyke. "Really. Now, I wonder if that would chance to be our old friend Kotei—you remember Kotei?" he added, turning to me.

"No, sir; this man's name is Futashima. There was another Jap in the works, a chap named Itu, a pal of Futashima's, but he's left."

"Ah! I don't know either of them. By the way, usen't there to be a cab-yard just about here?"

"There's a yard up Rankin Street where they keep vans and one or two cabs. That chap Itu works there now. Taken to horseflesh. Drives a van sometimes. Queer start for a Jap."

"Very." Thorndyke thanked the man for his information, and we sauntered on towards Rankin Street. The yard was at this time nearly deserted, being occupied only by an ancient and crazy four-wheeler and a very shabby hansom.

"Curious old houses, these that back on to the yard," said Thorndyke, strolling into the enclosure. "That timber gable, now," pointing to a house, from a window of which a man was watching us suspiciously, "is quite an interesting survival."

"What's your business, mister?" demanded the man in a gruff tone.

"We are just having a look at these quaint old houses," replied Thorndyke, edging towards the back of the hansom, and opening his pocket-book, as though to make a sketch.

"Well, you can see 'em from outside," said the man.

"So we can," said Thorndyke suavely, "but not so well, you know."

At this moment the pocket-book slipped from his hand and fell, scattering a number of loose papers about the ground under the hansom, and our friend at the window laughed joyously.

"No hurry," murmured Thorndyke, as I stooped to help him to gather up the papers—which he

did in the most surprisingly slow and clumsy manner. "It is fortunate that the ground is dry." He stood up with the rescued papers in his hand, and, having scribbled down a brief note, slipped the book in his pocket.

"Now you'd better mizzle," observed the man at the window.

"Thank you," replied Thorndyke, "I think we had;" and, with a pleasant nod at the custodian, he proceeded to adopt the hospitable suggestion.

"Mr. Marchmont has been here, sir, with Inspector Badger and another gentleman," said Polton, as we entered our chambers. "They said they would call again about five."

"Then," replied Thorndyke, "as it is now a quarter to five, there is just time for us to have a wash while you get the tea ready. The particles that float in the atmosphere of Limehouse are not all mother-of-pearl."

Our visitors arrived punctually, the third gentleman being, as we had supposed, Mr. Solomon Löwe. Inspector Badger I had not seen before, and he now impressed me as showing a tendency to invert the significance of his own name by endeavoring to "draw" Thorndyke; in which, however, he was not brilliantly successful.

"I hope you are not going to disappoint Mr. Löwe, sir," he commenced facetiously. "You have had a good look at that hat—we saw your marks on it—and he expects that you will be able to point us out the man, name and address all complete." He grinned patronizingly at our unfortunate client, who was looking even more haggard and worn that he had been on the previous morning.

"Have you—have you made any—discovery?" Mr. Löwe asked with pathetic eagerness.

"We examined the hat very carefully, and I think we have established a few facts of some interest."

"Did your examination of the hat furnish any information as to the nature of the stolen property, sir?" inquired the humorous inspector.

Thorndyke turned to the officer with a face as expressionless as a wooden mask.

"We thought it possible," said he, "that it might consist of works of Japanese art, such as netsukes, paintings, and such like."

Mr. Löwe uttered an exclamation of delighted astonishment, and the facetiousness faded rather suddenly from the inspector's countenance.

"I don't know how you can have found out," said he. "We have only known it half an hour ourselves, and the wire came direct from Florence to Scotland Yard."

"Perhaps you can describe the thief to us," said Mr. Löwe, in the same eager tone.

"I dare say the inspector can do that," replied Thorndyke.

"Yes, I think so," replied the officer. "He is a short strong man, with a dark complexion and hair turning grey. He has a very round head, and he is probably a workman engaged at some whiting or cement works. That is all we know; if you can tell us any more, sir, we shall be very glad to hear it."

"I can only offer a few suggestions," said Thorndyke, "but perhaps you may find them useful. For instance, at 13, Birket Street, Limehouse, there is living a Japanese gentleman named Futashima, who works at Badcomb and Martin's mother-of-pearl factory. I think that if you were to call on him, and let him try on the hat that you have, it would probably fit him."

The inspector scribbled ravenously in his notebook, and Mr. Marchmont—an old admirer of Thorndyke's—leaned back in his chair, chuckling softly and rubbing his hands.

"Then," continued my colleague, "there is in Rankin Street, Limehouse, a cab-yard, where another Japanese gentleman named Itu is employed. You might find out where Itu was the night before last; and if you should chance to see a hansom cab there—number 22,481—have a good look at it. In the frame of the number-plate you will find six small holes. Those holes may have held brads, and the brads may have held a false number card. At any rate, you might ascertain where that cab was at 11:30 the night before last. That is all I have to suggest."

Mr. Löwe leaped from his chair. "Let us go—now—at once—there is no time to be lost. A thousand thanks to you, Doctor—a thousand million thanks. Come!"

He seized the inspector by the arm and forcibly dragged him towards the door, and a few moments later we heard the footsteps of our visitors clattering down the stairs.

"It was not worth while to enter into explanations with them," said Thorndyke, as the footsteps died away—"nor perhaps with you?"

"On the contrary," I replied, "I am waiting to be fully enlightened."

"Well, then, my inferences in this case were perfectly simple ones, drawn from well-known anthropological facts. The human race, as you know, is roughly divided into three groups—the black, the white, and the yellow races. But apart from the variable quality of color, these races have certain fixed characteristics associated especially with the shape of the skull, of the eye-sockets, and the hair.

"Thus in the black races the skull is long and narrow, the eye-sockets are long and narrow, and the hair is flat and ribbon-like, and usually coiled up like a watch-spring. In the white races the skull is oval, the eye-sockets are oval, and the hair is slightly flattened or oval in section, and tends to be wavy; while in

the yellow or Mongol races, the skull is short and round, the eye-sockets are short and round, and the hair is straight and circular in section. So that we have, in the black races, long skull, long orbits, flat hair; in the white races, oval skull, oval orbits, oval hair; and in the yellow races, round skull, round orbits, round hair.

"Now, in this case we had to deal with a very short round skull. But you cannot argue from races to individuals; there are many short-skulled Englishmen. But when I found, associated with that skull, hairs which were circular in section, it became practically certain that the individual was a Mongol of some kind. The mother-of-pearl dust and the granules of rice starch from the inside of the hat favored this view, for the pearl-shell industry is specially connected with China and Japan, while starch granules from the hat of an Englishman would probably be wheat starch.

"Then as to the hair: it was, as I mentioned to you, circular in section, and of very large diameter. Now, I have examined many thousands of hairs, and the thickest that I have ever seen came from the heads of Japanese; but the hairs from this hat were as thick as any of them. But the hypothesis that the burglar was a Japanese received confirmation in various ways. Thus, he was short, though strong and active, and the Japanese are the shortest of the Mongol races, and very strong and active.

"Then his remarkable skill in handling the powerful caretaker—a retired police-sergeant—suggested the Japanese art of ju-jitsu, while the nature of the robbery was consistent with the value set by the Japanese on works of art. Finally, the fact that only a particular collection was taken, suggested a special, and probably national, character in the things stolen, while their portability—you will remember that goods of the value of from eight to twelve thousand pounds were taken away in two hand-packages—was much more consistent with Japanese than Chinese works, of which the latter tend rather to be bulky and ponderous. Still, it was nothing but a bare hypothesis until we had seen Futashima—and, indeed, is no more now. I may, after all, be entirely mistaken."

He was not, however; and at this moment there reposes in my drawing-room an ancient netsuke, which came as a thank-offering from Mr. Isaac Löwe on the recovery of the booty from a back room in No. 13, Birket Street, Limehouse. The treasure, of course, was given in the first place to Thorndyke, but transferred by him to my wife on the pretence that but for my suggestion of shell-dust the robber would never have been traced. Which is, on the face of it, preposterous.

death in the hills

by . . . Craig Rice

THE TIME was 1911, heyday of buxom burlesque queens and hijinks under the gaslights. The place, St. Louis, Missouri, rich, powerful, proud, but already disputing with New Orleans, her sister city to the south, a more doubtful renown as the original Babylon of barrel-house boogie, City of Song—and Sin.

It was night, and elsewhere the city was at rest, but in the tenderloin district the lights blazed and doors swung in, swung out, as the old song goes. The street lamps threw their golden circles of light on the sidewalk, to guide unsteady feet on the path to ruin. Into one of these dens of vice stepped the tall figure of a stranger.

The tanned face under the broad-brimmed hat marked him as a rancher, but the rest of his garb was a study in contrasts. The high, tight collar would have gone better with a derby hat, and the fancy vest was out of keeping with the sturdy, square-cut shoes. The stranger looked around him, flashed a

The many of us who welcomed Craig Rice's wonderfully zany studies of the Chicago only she—and John J. Malone—really knew, tend to forget that she was also a very shrewd and able newspaperwoman, and a frequent chronicler of the "stranger than fiction" doings of crime in the U.S.A. including this story of Oklahoma, back in 1911.

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roll of bills and announced in a loud voice:

"I'm from Oklahoma and I want to meet an Oklahoma girl!"

The men at the bar turned slowly round, took one look at the stranger, smiled, and returned to their drinks. Just another rancher, fresh from the hinterland and out for a good time. One of them shrugged his shoulders and muttered something about "a fool and his money—" as he saw a girl approaching the table where the stranger had seated himself and was ordering a drink.

"I used to live in Oklahoma."

It was a small, weak voice. The stranger turned and looked at the girl. For a moment a flash of recognition lit up his face, but only for a moment.

"Sit down," the stranger whispered. "Sit down and sip that drink, but don't look at me. They're watching us."

Under the glare of the gas lamp he could see the girl more plainly now. She couldn't have been more than eighteen, but her face, though heavily rouged, bore the livid scars of violence. She was trembling.

The stranger whispered, "I've come to get you out of this, Dolly Slade."

The girl started. "No!" she gasped. "No! Please!" But it was clear that she was not denying her identity. It was just plain fear. The stranger mentioned another name, and this time the girl nodded, fighting back the tears that seemed about to overwhelm her.

"Keep drinking, keep smiling," the stranger warned. "Don't look at me, but keep talking. Tell me all about it. I'm here to help you."

"It was him, all right," the girl breathed. "He took us to a place and left us with a strange man. He was a horrible man. He beat me and knocked my teeth out. I was unconscious—I don't know how long—and when I recovered Ina was gone. I haven't seen or heard of her since. They said they would kill me if I ever told this. You *won't* give me away, please! You *won't!*"

"Enough," the stranger whispered back. "Not a word of this to anyone." A waiter was approaching the table. There was a look of dim suspicion in his gimlet eyes.

The stranger scowled at the girl and, in a loud, rude voice, "Finish your drink and be off with you!" he said, and, in a whisper again, "I'll be back."

With this he rose, paid his bill and left.

If all this seems a bit theatrical, there is a good reason for it—it *was*. Sheer theater. For the stranger was not just a rancher on the loose. He was Sheriff Ben Totten of Ottowa County, Oklahoma, and he was playing a role. A role in a real life drama of blood and violence that was destined to become one of

the world's great classics of crime detection.

When the country Sheriff set out from his native Ozark mountains to go sleuthing in the big city it was not for the purpose of rescuing girls from a life of shame. Important as this was, it was only incidental to his main task. What Sheriff Totten had on his mind was—murder.

It must have seemed a long time to Ben Totten since that September day when a farmer rode in to the Sheriff's office in Miami, Oklahoma, and, dismounting from his horse, said:.

"Ben, there's death in them hills. Saw her m'self, just a young 'un, poor thing. No tellin' how long she's been there."

It may not have been a long time as the clock ticks, but even a few weeks is a long time when you're investigating a murder, long enough for the trail to get mighty cold.

He remembered the pathetic little face of the victim, ravaged almost beyond recognition by death and foul weather. The heavy autumn rains had washed out all trace of the slayer, who had committed the crime, so medical examination revealed, at least two weeks before, on September 15, 1911, if their reckoning was correct.

For days the body of the beautiful blond girl lay in the undertaking parlors at Miami while hundreds of people filed by, trying to identify her, and police at neighboring Fayetteville, Springfield and Tulsa searched their Missing Persons files for a clue. Result: no missing girls reported, and no one who could even guess who the dead girl was or where she came from. It was beginning to look as if the crime would remain unsolved.

It was then that Sheriff Totten's mind turned to the mysterious house in the hills.

Ben Totten had passed by the place before and he remembered it as a large house, larger than any he had ever seen in these hills. The path leading up to it was matted with thick underbrush. The trees that all but concealed it from view stood tall against the sky, and gnarled with the wounds of tornado, hail and lightning. Its high, arched windows were perpetually shuttered against the sun, and its doors were reputed to be forbiddingly locked against intrusion day and night.

The hill people for miles around spoke of "the house" with awe. They said it was a house of worship, a kind of "mission," and its worshippers called it "The House of Deuteronomy."

Its pastor was Dr. Allen Heeber, a patriarchal little man with old-fashioned sideburns, whose favorite Bible text was said to be the Eighteenth Chapter of Deuteronomy:

"And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice . . . the first fruit

of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him."

Dr. Heeber's flock took this biblical injunction seriously, for, as Ben Totten learned on his first visit to "the house," the barns back of the place were bulging with free will offerings. It was also on the occasion of this first visit that he met Mrs. Cora Wentworth, who was the matron in charge, in the absence of Dr. Heeber and his assistant pastor, James Garrett. When he asked Mrs. Wentworth whether she had knowledge of any missing girl and told her about the young murder victim who lay unidentified at Miami, the matron shook her head.

"I'm sure none of our girls has been lost," she said. "This is a training school, you know, and as they complete their studies our girls go out into the field as missionaries. What was she like, this girl you say was murdered?"

"She was around twenty," said the Sheriff, "medium height, slender, with a lot of unusually long, fair hair. She must have been right pretty—once."

No, Mrs. Wentworth knew of nobody who answered that description, she said, and when she came to Miami a few days later to view the body she repeated her assertion that the girl was nobody she knew. Dr. Heeber, too, viewed the body and denied he had ever seen the dead girl. Jim Garrett, the pastor's assistant, a long-faced, mustachioed man of about forty, who looked like the typical mountaineer of the Ozarks, also denied knowing the identity of the dead girl.

In spite of its outward appearance of dire foreboding The House of Deuteronomy, for all that Ben Totten could see, was just what its leaders purported it to be, a house of worship and a training school for young girl missionaries. Its atmosphere was apparently one of peace and quiet, and no breath of scandal had ever touched it. Sheriff Totten might have been forgiven if he had dropped this angle of the investigation right then and there —but he had a hunch. He carried his questioning further, to the three men who worked the farm in back of the house, Amos Smith, who was treasurer of the cult, Jim Byers, and Sam Kirby. It was from Sam Kirby that Totten got the first intimation that all was not serene in this Oklahoma Eden.

"We're not supposed to talk," Sam told the Sheriff, "but—why don't you go and see Mrs. Cairns. She was housekeeper before Mrs. Church. They had a big row one day and she quit. That was a week or so ago."

What is it they say about little acorns? Well, this one grew and grew till—but I don't want to get ahead of my story.

Dipping snuff and stirring a boiling kettle full of the family wash, Mary Cairns told her story. She

didn't know that there were any girls "missing" from the house, exactly, but she did think it queer the way her cousin's girl, Ina Lackey, was there one week and gone the next.

"I don't think Ina meant to go right then," she told Totten. "If she had, she'd have told me. Ina—and Dolly Slade, too. Jim Garrett took them. I'd sure like to know where they went."

About Jim Garrett, who "always took the girls away when they left the house to go out in the field," Mrs. Cairns had very definite opinions.

"Now there's a man I can't abide. Dr. Heeber may be all right. Seems he's got the call, but for all Garrett's preachin' the Lord's gospel, he's, well, he's tricky. I'd sure like to know where them girls went."

"Did any of the girls ever leave the house—alone?" the Sheriff asked.

Yes, come to think of it she did remember one. Josie Byers was her name, no kin to Jim Byers who lived at the farm. She remembered it because it was unusual for the girls to leave alone, Mrs. Cairns said. "It never happened before. I never felt very good about her going. Just before she left I saw her crying. She wouldn't tell me what was wrong. I liked the girl. If she'd said goodbye—but she didn't. Just up an' left."

She also remembered that Josie Byers was pretty and had very long, fair hair, and that her home was in Fayetteville.

Taken to the undertaking parlor at Miami, Mrs. Cairns took one look at the murdered girl and exclaimed—

"That's Josie, I'd swear it! I'd know her by her hair. Get Faye Church over here. She'll tell you the same thing. She's honest. She won't lie for anyone."

Faye Church hated to contradict Dr. Heeber, but she too identified the body as that of Josie Byers, and when Dr. Heeber persisted in denying that it was Josie, Mary Cairns blew up.

"I've no fine notions about Allen Heeber," she snapped. "He's as smooth as they come, and Cora Wentworth, too. I mistrusted the whole outfit when I found some of Josie's clothes hidden away in the storeroom. There's something wrong about that house, Mr. Totten," she cried. "I'm glad to be out of it."

A day or two later Ben Totten had even better reason than Mrs. Cairns to suspect that there was indeed something wrong about that house. His deputy came back from Fayetteville with a report that Josie Byers was not at the home of her folks, where Dr. Heeber said she had gone when she left the house —for the cult leader now admitted there had been a Josie Byers at the "mission," but that she had gone back to her folks in Fayetteville. The deputy also brought back with

him the information that Josie's little finger on her left hand was broken when she was a child and had always been crooked afterwards. And he had obtained a chart of the girl's teeth from a local dentist.

Both clues checked perfectly with the dead girl. It was Josie Byers, all right.

With warrants in his pocket, and accompanied by a deputy, Sheriff Totten headed up the winding mountain roads once more, bound for The House of Deuteronomy.

This time there was no reply when he knocked. The door was unlocked. He pushed it open and walked in. The silence that greeted the two men was like the silence of the tomb!

As Amos Smith, the cult's treasurer, described it when the Sheriff spied him and Jim Byers back of the house later, chopping wood as if nothing had happened—

"'Pears like they just up and left."

He had no idea where they went but he was sure Dr. Heeber would be back.

"I don't know what got into everybody all at once," he said, innocently.

As treasurer, Amos Smith knew, from his own records, that there should be about $10,000 in cash in the house—Dr. Heeber didn't believe in banks. But a thorough search soon revealed that the cash had gone with the prophet.

Mrs. Cairns was now willing to tell more. Cora Wentworth had threatened to shoot her once, she said. Yes, there was a gun in the house. Sheriff Totten remembered the .38 caliber bullet that was removed from the dead girl's skull. There was another thing Mary Cairns remembered. When Jim Garrett returned from the trip on which he took away Dolly Slade and Ina Lackey, he was carrying a package that bore the name of a store in St. Louis.

What Ben Totten found in St. Louis when he got there, we already know. The next night the police swooped down on the vice district in a series of well-planned raids. Many of the girls taken into custody proved to be "missionaries" from Dr. Heeber's mysterious cult house in the Ozark hills. Among them was Ina Lackey.

Both Dolly Slade and Ina Lackey promised to testify against the cult leaders, but Ben Totten was still faced with the problem of finding them. He had succeeded in breaking up one of the most vicious white slave rings in the country, but there was still that little matter of murder.

The fugitives might have made good their getaway for ever and a day—if it hadn't been for a sidewalk photographer by the name of Frank Munsie. Munsie was taking pictures as usual one fine afternoon the following Spring, on the beach at Santa Monica, California. He

snapped two pictures of a couple seated on the boardwalk, and when the man became furious and threatened to smash his camera if he did not turn over the negative at once, Munsie got suspicious. He turned over one of the negatives, but he took the other one to police headquarters. By this time the hunt for the cult fugitives was nationwide in scope, and police recognized the two faces on the picture.

When Sheriff Ben Totten arrived at the Los Angeles jail where the two were being held, he did not immediately accuse them of the murder of Josie Byers. He took them back east to answer for the disappearance of the money in the cult's treasury. But when he confronted Heeber with Dolly Slade and Ina Lackey, the cult leader offered to plead guilty to the white slave charge. Garrett was his accomplice, he said, and between them they collected $250.00 plus expenses for every girl they delivered. But he still kept mum about Josie Byers.

It was not till Jim Garrett was apprehended and proved his own innocence of the murder by an airtight alibi, and Ben Totten found the murder gun under a floor board in the attic of the cult house, that Heeber's calm was shaken. By this time, however, Mrs. Wentworth was dying in a sanitarium as the result of a tumor and was ready to confess.

"Dr. Heeber killed Josie Byers," she said. "The girl was infatuated with him. She wanted to marry him and threatened to tell certain things she had learned if he didn't. He woke me up in the middle of the night and told me he had decided to do it. They went away together. At five o'clock in the morning he came back. Alone. He said he had shot her with my gun and asked me what to do with it. I pried loose a board in the attic and put it there. We hid her clothing and in the morning we said she had decided to go home."

From Allen Heeber, Sheriff Totten heard a slightly different version of the story.

"There's no use fighting it any longer," he sighed. "It wasn't the way you heard it, however. I loved Josie. I wanted to marry her. But Cora Wentworth was jealous. And she had too much on me. She ordered me to kill Josie. I had to do it."

Which story was true? No one will ever know, for within an hour after he confessed Allen Heeber took poison and died in his cell. No one knows to this day how he managed to lay his hands on the poison. And Cora Wentworth died of the tumor with the secret locked in her heart.

Perhaps before he died the "prophet" of the mysterious cult house in the hills had occasion to reflect on another verse of that

favorite Eighteenth Chapter of his in the Book of Deuteronomy:

"There shall not be found among you any that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination . . . or a witch . . .

"For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord."

Know Your Own Precinct!

Captain John W. Trotter of the Washington Police Department knows the 9th police precinct, his command, with a completeness few people in the area realized—until a recent newspaper story. Because a policeman's knowledge of his precinct is one of his most effective tools, the Captain, determined that the men in his command know the district as well as he does, has initiated an interesting training program for the rookies in his command. Similar courses are to be started in neighboring precincts.

These men attend class under him, on their own time.

He begins by going over the organization and chain of command of the force—who is responsible for what and where—after which he turns to a large map of the precinct and begins to describe it—block by block—sometimes house by house. The precinct, which runs from the Supreme Court to the Maryland line, includes wholesale markets and railroad yards, high priced homes and crowded tenements. More than eighty thousand people live in the precinct.

But Captain Trotter's lectures don't only touch on problems peculiar to the area. He also gives the men advice on how to be better policemen, what to watch for, what to do under such and such circumstances.

Things such as writing down the numbers of suspicious cars, questioning people who seem out of place in certain neighborhoods or cars, checking clean cars when these have a set of dirty license plates, ways of handling prisoners, moving into trouble of one sort or another and the proper way of searching a man. And the need to remember "you're not always right, so approach situations carefully."

brigitte and the secret army

by . . . Jean-Etienne St. Lo

An American Dream has been lost!

It is more than likely that Brigitte Bardot's recent defiance of the OAS, France's far-from-secret right wing military organization, and her later taking part in an anti-OAS demonstration in Paris, will share honors in the folk-memories of our times with the day that a dismayed male public discovered that Marilyn Monroe also could read! That time Arthur Miller could always be blamed, but in this case the sexpot cliché was so firmly imbedded in the minds of most people (who didn't want to read anyway—they preferred to look . . .) that it was difficult to accept the reality that this was a practical Frenchwoman with a background and with interests which would make her instinctively distrust the characters who make up the command-ranks of the *Organization Armée Secrète* (*i.e.,* the Secret Army), particularly when they proposed to take from her money which she had worked so hard for. . . .

Who were these people anyway? The OAS had been founded on March 6th, 1961, in Switzerland, when twelve men, each representing fascist or rightist-extremist

Jean-Etienne St. Lo reported on the beginnings of the OAS in CONSPIRATOR'S PARADISE (SMM, June 1960). Here he discusses what has happened since then.

organizations, had agreed to combine forces in an all-out effort to topple the DeGaulle Government. The revolt of the Generals, the following month, added thousands to the ranks of the OAS—men and officers in the regular army and in the police, men who had in many instances helped DeGaulle to power and who now wanted to overthrow him because of, as they see it, his mis-handling of the Algerian situation.

These are men who in many instances lived through the Vichy days and the subsequent fighting between Petainists and DeGaullists. These are men who have seen the French Empire shrink—one of the Generals served in Indo-China for instance—and they refuse to face the need for still further concessions to reality if France is to survive through this generation. A lot of nonsense is being written about the class-nature of the leadership of this conspiracy, nonsense because this is to ignore the reality that many of these Generals and still more of these Colonels have come up from the ranks and emphatically do not represent a caste. But they *are* the products of a system. . . . They are citizen-soldiers—only a portion of them are the sons or grand-sons of general officers—and they have been trained in a school of thinking which goes out of its way to ignore the lessons of Vichy and what happened afterwards. In other words, a disturbing number of the young and the old who follow the Generals, who throw the plastic bombs, who threaten men and women such as Jean Paul Sartre and Francoise Sagan, do so convinced that only in this way can the France of their dreams be saved.

You sit in a restaurant on the Left Bank in Paris and are told how DeGaulle is France's only danger.

You are kidnapped on your way to school or work because your father or your uncle or your brother or your cousin is in some way identified with the Government, and if your father or your uncle or your brother or your cousin agrees to suggested terms you are of course released.

Or you are escorted, blindfolded, to a meeting with a man who tells you he is a press attache for the OAS, and how they only want you to tell the truth about what is happening when you send your next despatch abroad. The young man at the door ostentatiously examines his machine gun. And you listen to the young man with the burning eyes—and you think of the others—the men in the shadows who send these others out to do this in the name of France. . . .

the picture of guilt

by . . . Lawrence Treat

AT THE TIME that it happened, Ballinger was commanding officer of the ship. It was up to him to gather the facts, and he did.

He told the story after dinner, when our stomachs were full and our minds at peace. It is the best time to tell a story. And while he spoke, we passed the photograph around and examined it.

"It shows everything, about five seconds before the murder was committed," Ballinger said. "Naturally enough, it was the evidence on which they convicted him."

Then Ballinger started to tell us about Marty. Several of us, it turned out, had run across him during the war, and we remembered him. As who wouldn't?

Marty, you see, was a believer. In himself. He believed everything he ever said, at least until he'd finished saying it. And he probably would have forgotten all about the town if Turk Bennet, Marty's constant companion and greatest enemy, had allowed him to.

They were chief petty officers. Martin Fackenthal, Chief Boatswain's Mate, and Turk Bennet,

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Lawrence Treat, who has been active in this field for many years, is the author of the recent VENUS UNARMED (Doubleday) and of B *AS IN BANSHEE,* D *AS IN DEAD,* H *AS IN HANGMAN,* V *AS IN VICTIM and* T *AS IN TRAPPED (which aficionados will remember with pleasure), and of the more recent WEEP FOR A WANTON.*

Chief Quartermaster. Alongside Marty, who could have passed for a heavyweight contender, Turk looked like a kid, with his long neck and narrow head and light blue, guileless eyes.

Marty's first recorded mention of the town occurred during the war, in a certain messroom. He happened to spout some Italian, and Turk asked him how come he knew the language.

"From a girl I was brought up with," Marty answered truthfully. His dark gray eyes glowed at the thought of her, and his voice softened to the rumble of a distant cannonade. "Besides," he added, with his need to embellish, "I used to hear it around the house. My old man comes from there."

Turk let out a roar of laughter. "With a name like that, he's from Italy, huh? Me, I'm Chinese."

Marty groped inside his thick, sturdy skull, and came up with an explanation. "He changed his name when he came to the states. The landlord had trouble spelling it, so the old man took the landlord's name instead. Fackenthal. Got a month's free rent out of it, too." Marty tried to remember his father, and made no progress. "He was quite a guy. Got a town named after him, in Italy."

Turk winked. "I got a hundred bucks says you're a liar."

Marty grinned cheerfully and took out a small, black book, in which he noted down the bet. "The funny thing is," he said, "I can tell you every street in that town, and who lives in it."

"Yeah?" said Turk. "Let's hear you."

Marty talked, and his description was memorable. As the years went by and Turk kept needling him in an effort to trip him up and win the bet, Marty embroidered his account. With each recital, a certain proportion of his audience recorded its skepticism in the small, black book. On various occasions Turk increased his stake until he had a substantial part of the whole, which ran into several thousand dollars.

Ordinarily, Marty was not known for his flights of fancy, but he did passably well with the mythical town of his alleged ancestry, possibly because what he related was a rehash of various tales that had been told him by the girl next door, when she and Marty were kids. She used to spin out her stories to keep from going down the block and getting into a fight, and he called her Sherry, after the dame in the Arabian Nights. Sherry Sard, or something, the way Marty remembered. But he told Turk all about her.

She taught school for a while in Albany, and she had dark, clear eyes that used to fascinate Marty. He'd proposed to her just before his first hitch in the navy, and he meant every word of it. But by the time he came back, he'd forgotten, and

so he proposed again, with fervor. He set the wedding day for the week after his discharge.

Being a patriotic guy, however, and realizing that the navy couldn't get along without him, he re-enlisted. He told Sherry about it with considerable pride, and he started to propose again, but he had a vague sense of repeating himself, and he refrained. Besides, he liked things the way they were. Sherry's apartment was practically home to him, and she cooked him luscious, Italian dishes, while they talked about the good old days when they'd sat in her back yard.

So Sherry was responsible for the whole business, and sometimes Marty remembered her exact words and used her images. She'd had a talent for imagining, and the gang ate up all the details—the cool, golden wine, the white-washed houses and the olive groves, and the dark-eyed girls who bloomed young and sweet. In particular, the girls.

"Some day I'll go there," Marty would say dreamily. He'd sink his strong teeth into the soft end of a cigar and then roll the butt along his leathery, muscular lips. "All I got to do is stand in the big square and tell 'em who I am. Then I take my pick of the dames, and when I get back I collect my dough from you guys."

The paradise that might or might not await Marty became a kind of ship's legend, and stories surrounding the story were passed around. For instance, there was the one about the time Marty had had a ship torpedoed from under him. It was said he got knocked groggy and was on his way down for the third time when Turk spotted him and yelled, "Before you go under —what about my dough, huh? Trying to weasel out of it?"

The taunt brought Marty raging out of the Pacific. He struggled over to the life raft, let Turk pull him up and then tried to beat his brains out. They traded a few haymakers, but presently they were distracted by a wet officer floating around nearby. They hauled him out and followed him up with a few more survivors, until the raft was too crowded to finish the fight.

As a result of the episode they both got medals, and Marty wrapped his in cellophane and occasionally exhibited it, to dames. It gave his batting average a substantial boost.

As everybody on the ship knew, Marty won the war and elected to stay with the navy. Turk stuck with him, possibly to protect his investment and continue the argument that had been interrupted on the raft. As for Sherry, she married someone else and dropped out of Marty's life.

Eventually his ship went on a certain mission in the Mediterranean. She dropped anchor in various harbors, and sailed on. In due time she put into a small port

in the south of Italy, and Marty felt in his bones that he was approaching his personal Ultima Thule.

Being a believer, he was not unhappy. Anxious, perhaps, because of that long list in his notebook, but right was clearly on his side, for it could never be on Turk's. Fate belonged to Marty, and he found himself studying a local map. His forefinger came to rest, with or without volition, on a town located in the mountains, due inland. It had a name that sounded like the one he'd always talked about. In a kind of daze, he realized he was committed. He asked for shore leave and got it.

He had just put on a clean shirt and he was brushing his uniform when Turk came in, along with a few other interested parties. Marty concentrated on his sleeve and carefully smoothed down a microscopic thread that ruined the sharp outline of one of the broad, gilt hashmarks, one for every year of service.

"How you figure on proving this thing?" Turk asked.

Marty shrugged. "They'll take pictures, I guess. When they see me come walking across the square, with the fig trees and the roses in the center, they'll declare a holiday and the whole town'll stop work."

"Yeah?" Turk said sarcastically. "Kid Fackenthal, huh?"

Marty found the remark pointless. "They'll remember my old man. Five minutes after I get there I'll have a couple of dames for myself, one on each arm, see? I'll take the bridal suite at the best hotel and I'll step out on the balcony and make a speech."

"What are you going to talk about? How to get a deck scrubbed?"

Marty hardly heard. "Then," he said, "I'll order up the biggest plate-load of spaghetti they got, and the best vino in town. After that—just think of me and that pair of dames. You think I look all right?"

Turk studied him. There were seventy-three inches of length to examine. There were two hundred pounds of bone and flesh and muscle cooped up in that uniform. The broad, low forehead curved underneath Marty's hair-line like the outline of the Black Sea coast. The Dnieper River parted the land mass of his hair; the Crimean Peninsula, wide and spreading, served for nose. His mouth was on the opposite shore and his eyes, gray and somber, were a couple of provincial capitals.

Feature by feature, Turk surveyed the map. "For a gorilla," he announced, "you look pretty well disguised. But the gang think I ought to come along, just to see what really happens."

Later that afternoon, after a devious journey, they arrived. Marty had a sizeable fortune with him, in liras. He climbed out of the rickety bus and took out the small clothesbrush which was his only piece of

baggage. He cleaned his uniform carefully, with special attention to the hash stripes, and he wiped his shoes with an extra handkerchief. Then, with rare generosity, he flicked at Turk's shoes, too.

"Got to uphold the honor of the navy," he said.

Turk finished the job and brought out the mirror-like polish. "Now what?" he asked.

"Now," said Marty, "you blow. How in hell can I operate, with you nosing around?"

"The gang sent me," Turk said. "Official observer."

"Okay," Marty said confidently. "Stick around and watch."

Turk nodded, and thereafter he stayed in the background. Although he spoke no Italian, his visual report was a major contribution to the story of Marty Fackenthal's odyssey.

Marty marched forward with mixed feelings. This wasn't much of a town, and what there was of it bothered him. It looked broken down, despair showed in the peeling plaster of the houses and in the droop of the people who trudged wearily down the narrow, cobblestoned streets. At Marty's greeting they lifted their heads in a kind of quick, startled surprise. But after a moment or two, they turned away. They simply didn't believe in him. Marty was a hallucination.

He was perplexed by the rejection in those glances. He was aware that he cut a fine figure, that his gold shone and his teeth gleamed and he towered a full head over everybody he met. So he didn't understand. The unreality of it began to affect him and he rubbed his Crimean Peninsula to make sure it was still there in all its broad, twisted contours. Then he strode into the main square.

It was wide, dusty, barren, empty. The trees were gray and the houses sagged and there were no roses. A low, crumbling structure marked *Albergo* leaked a few café tables, but nobody was sitting there, and the chairs themselves didn't expect that anybody ever would.

Marty took it all in, and he dominated the scene like a volcano. He breathed a warm, exuberant energy. His face was meaty, with the sense of solid protein and teeming vitamins. The rays of the sun caught the gilt stripes on his sleeve and the dust-cover of his campaign ribbons, so that he fairly blazed with color.

Then, somewhere below him, he heard a voice. "Mister," it chirped, in broken English. "I'm the committee recepsh. You want the guide?"

Marty looked down. The little man was like something that had been sawed off irregularly, and then given up as hopeless. Even his teeth had been lopped unevenly and showed little, reddish stumps between worn, yellowed fragments. He hadn't shaved in several days, and his smile was straight garlic. Still, he spoke, and he was human.

Marty laughed, and answered in Italian. "I need no guide," he said. "This is the town of my ancestors." He forced the wheels of his memory to turn creakily, and he recalled a name that Sherry had once mentioned. "Giuseppi Facchini. He left many years ago."

"Time passes," said the little man. "It matters not. But perhaps you know my American friend Antonio Farrini, who was like a brother to me. His son studied to be an officer police, and we lived close by, in Brooklyn, and once we spent a night together in jail because we drank whisky instead of wine. By mistake. Doubtless he sent you here."

"No. Just show me the house of the Facchinis, where I will be welcome."

The monkey looked up at the gorilla. "There are no Facchinis, but Farrini has a cousin in a nearby village. Perhaps you look for him?"

"Shut up," said Marty. "You ask too many questions."

The little guy frowned. "You are a great man, as anyone can see, and I am only Benito Pelloni, a hungry man without the money to go back to Brooklyn. But I know all the pretty girls, and perhaps you would like to make an arrangement?"

"Now you're talking," said Marty.

He wet his lips. He felt the softness of the shadows slide over him, and he turned slowly. About a dozen people had gathered. They were gaping at him, and they were gaunt, bony, sad. But their eyes, fixed unwaveringly on him, expressed nothing.

Purely for the sake of formality, Marty asked his question. "What troubles them, Benny?"

"Hunger," said the little man. "Everybody is hungry, especially me."

"Come, then," said Marty. "We'll eat at the *albergo*. Everybody."

He lifted his hand to invite the crowd, but Benny grabbed his arm. "No, they will eat too much and get sick. Only me, I have the stomach expansible."

Marty shrugged, and he had the beginning of an idea. He took Benny by the arm and marched him towards the café. The crowd did not follow, but stayed in the square, watching. They kept strolling past Marty and staring at him in a kind of awe.

The pantomime annoyed Marty. "Why don't they beat it?" he asked. "What are they looking at me for?"

"They admire," said Benny, with his mouth full.

"Let's organize their admiration," said Marty. He took a sizeable wad of liras from his pocket. Enough, say, to support a peasant family for about a year, or to buy out a bordello for a couple of nights. "If they really want to eat," he said, "how about their giving me a little celebration, first? You

hire a photographer and get something in the paper saying how Martino Facchini—that's me—he came home and the town put on a parade for him. You fix that up for tomorrow, Benny, and the dough's all yours."

Benny grabbed it. "It is done," he said. "I am the local reporter for IL GIORNO, in the city. I telephone them, and they make a fine story." He grinned happily. "And then maybe I go back to America."

Marty snorted, but across the square he saw a girl slip from one of the side streets, blink at the sun and smile quietly.

Marty put down his fork. She was wearing a black cotton dress, and her soft, creamy skin rippled in the light. Even from a distance he could tell that her eyes were mysterious and deep, and that they'd flash suddenly and shyly. In any language, she was a knockout.

He gestured briefly. "Who is she?"

Benny shoveled himself a second helping of spaghetti. "She is nobody."

"Introduce me," said Marty.

"To Lisa? It is not possible."

"Call her. I want her in the parade, sitting next to me. And I'll pay."

"No," said Benny. "Not Lisa. She loves Sebastian, she would talk of him all the time, she would bore you. Any other girl you can have, and for only three thousand liras."

He studied Marty with a commercial eye. "Three thousand. Maybe less."

"I want no one else," said Marty. "And I'm sick of this run-around and sick of the whole lousy town. It's dead."

"No, no," said Benny, and for a moment he stopped eating. "The town lives. It waits upon you, and tonight we have the opera. The Italian people may lack food, but never music. In the entire city of Brooklyn, is there a real opera? No. But here in a humble village, we have the loudest singers in the world." He glanced slyly at Marty and added, "Lisa sings, too. Sometimes."

Marty filled his glass with wine and downed it in one long gulp. "Stop stalling," he said. "If you want to keep that money, you'll do what I say. So get busy, and send Lisa here. I'll be inside."

Benny started to object, but thought better of it. He nodded miserably, and even tried to smile. Marty took out a fistful of liras and shoved them at Benny. "And buy us some opera tickets, too. The best."

That was how Marty came to be lounging in the sitting-room of the *albergo,* with a bottle of strega in front of him. He could see the garden, which consisted of a few dusty shrubs and the remnants of a rose arbor. The scene was much as Sherry used to describe, except for the poverty and the drought.

He heard a knock on the door and he called out in Italian. "Come in."

Lisa entered. She seemed to slink past the door, and she closed it and leaned against the frame. She was even more beautiful than Marty had expected. The coarse, black cotton of her dress made her skin glow like evening clouds, pale and lustrous. Her dark eyes were clear and young and bright, and they stared at Marty. But when he stood up, Lisa froze in terror.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "You didn't have to come here if you didn't want to."

"I obey my father," she said in a choked-up whisper.

"Father?" said Marty. "That little monkey—your father?"

Her eyes flashed and she straightened up. "He is not a monkey," she said angrily, "but perhaps you are."

Marty laughed, and the whole thing kind of got him. "Lisa," he said, "you're okay. You'll do."

But she remained motionless, shy and afraid and unsure of herself. Marty poured a couple of drinks of strega and offered her one. She shook her head quickly. No. Marty shrugged, and drank.

Suddenly Lisa shot across the room and tugged at his sleeve. "Signor Admirale," she said. "Please—there is something you must do."

"Me?" said Marty in bewilderment.

"It is for Sebastian," she said. "He wants to go to America, where he can make money. You must help him."

"How can I do that?"

"You can accomplish anything. You, an admiral."

It was the second time she'd called him that. Marty frowned and caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. The neat blue uniform, the stripes and insignia and hash marks, and all the campaign ribbons.

So that was why the crowd had been staring at him. They thought he was big stuff, they looked up to him. And probably Benny had helped the idea along, too.

Marty turned back to Lisa, and it hit him now that he had everything in the palm of his hand. Turk, who couldn't talk Italian, would be watching. All Marty had to do was to let this admiral idea get around, and the town would put on a celebration. Turk would see it, and never guess the reason. Marty's luck was holding.

"Why do you want to send this Sebastian away?" Marty asked Lisa. "Why, if you love him?"

"Because that is what he wants."

"Doesn't he love you?"

"Yes," she said in a timid, embarrassed voice. "He loves me, but he does not know it. You see, he lives next door and he takes me for granted."

"I'll fix that up," said Marty. "You and me, we're going to the opera, and we'll show this guy

something. If you're good enough for an admiral, he'll forget about America and he'll want the admiral's girl. The thing is, you got to make him jealous."

"I don't know," said Lisa. "Perhaps yes, and perhaps no."

"You leave it up to me," Marty said with authority. "But first, you got to doll up a little. Tell Benny to go get your best dress."

Lisa touched the coarse black cotton. "I have no other."

"Then get your opera costume," Marty ordered. "Benny can bring it over. We're going to do this thing in style. Glamor, huh?"

It was quite a procession, the way Benny engineered it. He got hold of a horse and carriage, and he sat on the box with the driver and waved an American flag. Lisa was dressed in costume, with a crown in her hair, and she had a necklace of glass beads that looked like diamonds.

Half the town followed along, behind the carriage, and women held up little kids so that they could feast their eyes on Marty, and somebody took pictures. At the opera house, the ticket collector said it was an honor to have such a distinguished guest, and that the performance would surely be memorable. The usher bowed and led Marty and Lisa up a special staircase to a box with statues on either side. Below, there was a coat of arms supported by a group of angels.

Marty looked down at the angels and said to Lisa, "What does this mean?"

Benny answered. "Long ago, this box belonged to the count."

Marty turned. The little squirt was grinning, and all his tooth stumps showed and he thought he was big stuff, too.

"How'd *you* get here?" Marty asked. Benny kept grinning, and Marty said, "Go bring us a bottle of wine. And tell the paper about that parade I had, huh?"

"Sure thing," Benny chirped, and pattered off.

The crowd started filtering in, and Marty sat close to Lisa and asked her to point out Sebastian when he arrived.

"He sings in the chorus," she said. "He is one of the gypsies."

Marty spotted him in the first act, a dark, good-looking boy with a nice pair of shoulders. He had class all right, and he kept staring hard at Lisa, as if he'd never really seen her before.

Marty had trouble staying awake during the opera. Why they went to all this fuss and yelled their heads off, he didn't know. But between the acts, it was different. The audience stood up and crowded around to where they could get a good view of Marty. They gabbed away, but about all Marty could pick out was the one word, Admirale. And then they started cheering him.

Marty ate it all up, and they be-

gan calling for a speech. About the only guy in the place who lacked enthusiasm was Turk, sitting in the back of the orchestra and looking worried. Which was fine with Marty. It meant Turk was swallowing the whole business, and would go back to the ship and tell the gang to pay up.

Marty winked at him and tried to remember the total to be collected, but Marty was never too good at arithmetic. Besides, he had other things on his mind. He stood up proudly, with his chest out and his stomach in. He felt bigger than ever, and he was glad of the uniform and the hash marks and the campaign ribbons. They gave him tone. He put his arm around Lisa, and he reached for his wine glass and held it up.

"To the most beautiful girl in Italy," he said. And she nuzzled up to him like she was his for the night.

The crowd gave a shout that almost blew Marty out of the box. He raised his hand again, for silence, and he said, "Free wine for everybody. In honor of Lisa and me." And he took out some more liras and flung them down to the pit.

Some of the crowd started up the stairs to the box, they wanted to shake hands with the admiral so they could tell their grandchildren about it, but Marty didn't want to be bothered.

"Keep 'em out," he said to Benny. "Look, you stand outside, and tell the bums to lay off. You're my bodyguard, see? Like a secret service man."

Benny grinned. He knew all about the secret service and how important it was. He hid himself behind one of the curtains, as if he was guarding the safety of the president of the United States.

During the last act, the wine had its effect and you could hardly hear the singers, but nobody seemed to mind. But it was more than Turk could take, and he disappeared somewhere. And it was too much for Sebastian, too. From his place on the stage, he had to keep looking at his best girl holding hands with Marty. That was why, just before the big finale, he sneaked off. Later on, everybody remembered how angry he was.

Lisa didn't miss the effect on Sebastian, either, and she took Marty's hand and whispered, "Thank you, Signor Admirale."

Marty grunted. "Like I told you, just leave it up to me. Lisa, we got a whole night ahead of us."

After the final curtain, a photographer set up a camera in the balcony and aimed it down at Marty. He pressed close to Lisa and he squeezed her hard. Maybe she liked him or maybe she was putting on and act for Sebastian, but she tilted her head back and gazed up at Marty with big, shiny eyes.

She hardly blinked when the flash-bulb exploded, but suddenly

Marty felt her tremble. It was a great moment for him, and just about his last. Because a few seconds later, he was stabbed to death.

That, more or less, is the story Ballinger told us.

"When Turk reported back," he said, "he brought the picture you're looking at. It's a truthful account of what happened. And of course, it shows Marty in his glory. On the basis of it, he could have collected every single bet recorded in that book of his."

We all studied the picture again. You could see some of the crowd, and they were cheering Marty lustily. The box he occupied was decorated with an elaborate coat of arms, and Marty was standing in the front of it, in the full panoply of his uniform. His arm was around a girl who was both young and beautiful, and she was gazing up at him with pure adoration. She was dressed like a countess, with lavish jewels and with a tiara in her hair.

You could see the bulge in the curtain where Benny had apparently stationed himself. Although he was hidden, the light gleamed on one of his shoes. But he wasn't much of a bodyguard, because the curtains were parted and a handsome gypsy was hurling himself forward. He had a dagger in one hand, and he was about to assault Marty.

I kept staring at the picture, aware from the way Ballinger spoke that there was more to it than I saw.

"That's Sebastian, I suppose," I said, "but what's the point? That he thought it was dark, and the flash-bulb just happened to catch him in the act? Is that it?"

"Not exactly," said Ballinger. "It shows Sebastian was innocent. Sebastian was sore and he was jealous and he was about to attack Marty. But murder? Impossible. Sebastian was in costume."

"I don't follow," I said.

Ballinger smiled. "The dagger was the same type the rest of the gypsy chorus used for stage props, no doubt about it. And the daggers were rubber."

"Oh," I said, feeling a little silly. "In that case he merely hit Marty, and Benny was behind the curtain. In the confusion, he must have stepped out and stabbed Marty. Benny did it, to save the honor of his daughter. But— can you identify a man by his shoe?"

"You can by that one," said Ballinger. "Probably the only real shoe in town. The rest of them are canvas, but that one was broad, black and beautifully polished. A navy shoe. Turk's."

"But—why?" somebody asked in a stunned voice.

"Plenty of reasons. Turk stood to lose a lot of money. He suspected all along that somehow or other he was being tricked, but he couldn't say that to his shipmates

and he certainly couldn't run the risk of somebody figuring out how he'd been fooled. It was more than he could stand. Not to speak of how Marty would ride him the rest of his life."

"But if Turk was waiting behind that curtain, Benny must have seen him several minutes earlier."

"Maybe," said Ballinger, "and maybe not. I saw no point in asking. Because, basically, this was a private matter between Marty and Turk."

A SCHOOL FOR SPIES?

The East German Government is reported to be operating a colony, at Bautzen, near Dresden, for roughly two hundred and fifty men without a country. Americans, Englishmen and Frenchmen who, for one or another reason, have defected to the Communists. They are said to be given employment in factories in the area, paid at prevailing East German wage scales. While they are housed at special locations it seems, according to stories told by returned members of the colony, that there are no particular restrictions on their movements outside the Bautzen area other than those imposed upon the local people. There is a deliberate effort made to make them feel at home and to adjust to life in East Germany. If they do not adjust, the security police may no doubt take a hand.

A British soldier who'd wandered into the countryside outside East Berlin tells how—after days of interrogation—he was given the choice of either going to Bautzen, or going to jail. He chose Bautzen. Once there, and while working as a plasterer, he met an East German girl, fell in love with her, and was planning to marry when he received word that his father was ill back in England. Upon which he made his way back to West Berlin — and the subsequent court martial.

A majority of the members of the colony have come to Bautzen either through love affairs with East German girls or too much liquor consumed in East Berlin — and the morning after. . . . There is reason to believe that some of the members of the colony are being groomed for possible espionage duty — no doubt not without first making certain that these are not Trojan Horses introduced into the community by Western Intelligence — but details are lacking, understandably so. Remembering as one does precedents for such an assumption, it stands to reason that some of the young men who end up at Bautzen may find themselves involved in other things than plastering or brick-laying. East German police officials who have defected to the West are said to have spelled out this possibility in some detail.

—ARPAD

what's new in crime

by . . . Stefan Santesson

It had always been understood that Uncle Fred was quite mad.

Pleasantly mad, of course . . .

Fred Burnham, "brilliant, talented, warm and generous and passionate" (p. 19) lived in France because there was simply no other country in the world where one could live. His half-brother "Richard the schemer, shrewd in matters of money and giving nothing away until he was sure he could get better in return" (again p. 19)—and particular, to put it mildly, about his food—was the direct antithesis of Fred.

And still the two had met—and still Fred Burnham had died a lonely and sudden death, hours away from Paris—and as Jeff Flanders continued to search for the answer to his uncle's death and to the other man's evasions he was finding himself involved in what appeared to be a fantastic conspiracy to hoodwink—but I'd better stop at this point. . . . Lawrence Treat's VENUS UNARMED (Doubleday, $2.95), is that rarity in these days, a thoroughly delightful novel about people whom some may find incredible (I am thinking of the murderer, when I say that) but this is

Mr. Santesson, editor of this magazine since 1956 and former editor, between 1945 and 1952, of the Unicorn Mystery Book Club, continues his column of comments on recent mystery and suspense novels and other material of interest to SMM readers.

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only if your ways have lain in quieter paths. . . . Do read VENUS UNARMED! You will thank me!

By way of contrast, there is Forbes Rydell's excellent study of a kidnapping and of the mind of the man who in the act seeks revenge for what has happened so many years ago. Five children from wealthy families are kidnapped in Forbes Rydell's THEY'RE NOT HOME YET (Doubleday, $2.95) but the ransom involved is not so important to the sick man who is the kidnapper as is the knowledge that at long last he can strike back.

Even the hint of buried treasure has been known to do things to men's minds, as is the case in Brad Williams' MAKE A KILLING (Mill-Morrow, $2.95), where a rather mixed lot of people, some decorative and some less so, seek the answer to the killing of an elderly Mexican who, minutes before it happened, had held in his hands two gold doubloons. Not quite believable as a story, but relaxing.

Ben Gordon, high-school teacher with an affinity for situations such as these, run into a former student, a successful night club comic, and is invited to spend the weekend at his place in the country.

Someone dies during this weekend—someone who could have done rather unpleasant things to the lives of several people who are part of the entourage of this Jackie Meadows—brittle and possibly shallow people who live in a very special world whose standards and whose mores are decidedly different from those of the outside world. Ivan T. Ross' OLD STUDENTS NEVER DIE (Doubleday, $2.95) explores this world—which is a very real world I might add—and in so doing no doubt makes an interesting, if not particularly cheerful, contribution to the socio-documentary writings reflecting these our times. The characters are effective enough, and not too pleasant, but I suspect that many will agree with me that Jackie Meadows (any apparent similarity to characters appearing on some programs is no doubt a coincidence) comes through, particularly at the end, unusually well.

Perry Mason has become so much a part of the folk-lore of our times that it is difficult to comment, objectively, on this extraordinary lawyer's lawyer. Suffice it that Earle Stanley Gardner's THE CASE OF THE RELUCTANT MODEL (Morrow, $2.95) is in the accepted Perry Mason tradition—eminently readable, to say the least.

Mr. Horace of the *Daily Snapshot* has always been an appealing personality as he wanders in and out of situations which would shake the normal man, even the normal crime-reporter, keeping in mind that Mr. Horace is not built in the latter-day

tradition of the indestructibles who normally shoot and wench their way (and drink their way) in so many of these mysteries. . . . There isn't the same feeling of warmth, however, to Seldon Truss' lastest report on Mr. Horace's exploits, A TIME TO HATE (Doubleday, $2.95). The characters are grimmer and more frustrated, from the Governor of the Prison who witnesses the flogging of a man whom he has reason to hate, to the others, the frustrated and the unfrustrated, who contribute to what the publishers' blurb refers to as "a tangle of avarice, violence and vice. . . ." Oh well. . . .

I should of course have commented on A. A. Fair's SHILLS CAN'T CASH CHIPS (Morrow, $2.95) long before this, but it is as difficult to comment on Bertha Cool's approach to life as it is to comment on Perry Mason's approach to life and these times. This latest novel is in the "Cool" tradition. You will like it.

And you will have mixed feelings about E. X. Ferrars' SEEING DOUBLE (Doubleday, $2.95), the story of what happens after a very new bride thinks—for one frightened moment—that her husband has changed to an abusive, glassy-eyed drunk. He hasn't, of course, but there is a relationship between the two men which complicates life for all and sundry in the days and the weeks to come. The handling of many of the people reflects the author's usual gentle perfection.

Doris Miles Disney's novels have always been interesting portraits of our times. She has written and in SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE (Doubleday, $2.95) she again writes about men and women whom you have an uneasy feeling you must have seen sometime in the last few days. This story of Grace Munson's flirtation with death is no exception. There is the familiar deftness. But not the warmth.

I liked William Campbell Gault's COUNTY KILL (Simon & Schuster, $3.50) as a novel—but also for another and more personal reason. In this portrait of the great and of the near great, of the lonely and of the surrounded who make up the community that is San Valdesto, we see something of a situation which I find rather disturbing—the breakdown of communication between the peoples who are a part of society as we know it. This disturbs me because there is the seed of future troubles in this lack of contact—in this all-knowingness about things on the other side of the world and this ignorance of what men and women and children are thinking on the other side of town, what their problems are—what their fears are—and what their dreams are. Brock Callahan comes up against this as he hunts a murderer in San Valdesto.

the cloth-of-gold murders

by . . . Baynard Kendrick

CHES ARTHUR sat huddled down against the biting Florida night wind in the open boat he'd hired to take him from the mainland to Crescent Island. He was silently reviling the fate that had made him miss the last ferry at 5 P.M. After two years of army in Japan and a drive across country in a second-hand car he'd bought in California, it seemed like rotten luck to have two tires blow out less than a hundred miles from home.

He'd tried to reach Dan, his father, by long-distance telephone to say he'd arrive too late for the ferry, but he'd been told Dan was out with a charter party. This was not unusual, since Dan made his living taking out shelling and fishing parties on his thirty-four-foot cabin cruiser, the UR2. Ches had compromised by leaving a message with Phyllis Lawson at Crescent Lodge. Phyllis had promised to tack a note on the dock where Dan could see it when he got in.

There was no sign of Dan or the UR2 when Ches arrived at the tiny

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Baynard Kendrick, while best known for his many novels about Captain Duncan Maclain, the famous blind detective, will no doubt be remembered by readers of this magazine for his almost prophetic MURDER MADE IN MOSCOW (August 1957, SDM). Here Mr Kendrick turns to mayhem in pleasanter climes—in the Gulf of Mexico. . . .

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mainland town at seven. He was more disappointed than worried at Dan's failure to appear.

He finally parked his car near the ferry dock and hired a boy with a fast fishing boat to take him on the last leg home.

Ches breathed easier as the speeding boat cut diagonally around a shallow bar and headed west, leaving the lighthouse on Star Point astern.

Star Point was the eastern end of Crescent, the ten-mile-long island that lay due east and west, like a great, curved banana, separating the Gulf of Mexico from San Carlos Bay. The outer curve of Crescent, on the Gulf side, was a shelly beach dotted with cottages and a few small hotels.

The inner curve on the north side of the island, along which Ches and the boy were running through the dark, was a ten-mile mangrove swamp, ragged with creeks and shallow lagoons. Three miles west of Star Point a narrow pass cut into the mangrove swamp at Harbor Point. That was the entrance to Marlin Bay, the island's only navigable lagoon, a circular lake about two miles across which looked, on the chart, like a bite taken from the thick mangroves on the inner side of the banana.

Straight south across Marlin Bay from the entrance at Harbor Point, a hundred-foot dock, paralleling the shore, had been built by outside interests years before. It was there that Dan docked the UR2.

The boy put his head close to Ches and spoke just loud enough to carry over wind and engine: "You Dan Arthur's son?"

Ches nodded.

"Look like him. Same big hands and long face. Same red hair. Been away?"

"Couple of years. Army in Japan."

"The Army'll get me soon." The boy veered, cutting a curve in the island, and headed straight for the entrance to the bay. "Wish I had a boat like your old man's UR2. Only for-hire boat on the island that takes out parties shell dredging. Seventy-five smackers a day. Fifty for fishing. Good deal!"

"Good deal when you get a party," Ches said.

"Just for shells!" The boy spat overside. "Who wants them?"

Ches grinned. "Shell collectors, scientists, naturalists, tourists. Put anybody on Crescent for ten days and you'll find him walking the beach with a bucket, head down, rear up. Let him find one rare shell and he's a conchologist."

"Same as a guy who gets his first tarpon."

"Same thing, except some shells are very rare and worth a lot of money. You have to go dredging to get that kind. Get them alive. Shells washed up on the beach in a storm are mostly chipped and dead."

They went through a line of telephone poles where a mile of over-

head wires stretched from Harbor Point north to Fisher Island.

The boy said, "Those poles are coming down when they build that bridge across from Fisher Island. Your old man will be rich when he sells your place."

"Dan won't sell," Ches said. There had been talk of that bridge before he went away. "That's our home. We couldn't get a tenth of what it's worth, anyhow."

"You can now," the boy stated emphatically. "The bridge can't be built without your place. You got the only right of way from Harbor Point through the swamp to the main road on the island."

"Then there won't be any bridge," Ches said shortly.

The kid shrugged and grunted through the darkness at people who would turn down money for any reason whatsoever.

As the boy swung sharp left to negotiate the narrow entrance through the mangroves into Marlin Bay, the trees thinned out ashore, revealing a lighted window in a big, white house on Harbor Point.

Once a fishermen's club, the house had been bought by a crusty old naturalist, Prof. Adolph Andersen, a year before Ches went away. The pudgy, bald-headed, choleric professor had made it only too clear that he wanted to be let alone. Local labor had helped him install an elaborate aquarium, but once the work was done, Professor Andersen had promptly surrounded the house and grounds with an electrically wired hurricane fence that reminded the island people of a Nazi stockade.

The professor's small dock was equipped with floodlights controlled from the house. A fishing boat that had developed engine trouble had limped in to Andersen's dock one night to make repairs, and had been welcomed with a blaze of light and a warning blast from a shotgun. After that episode, although the professor was cordially disliked, his KEEP OFF signs on the dock were carefully heeded.

As the boat swept by the dock Ches asked, "Is old Andersen still living there?"

"Guess so. No one ever sees him. Your old man takes him groceries on the UR2 twice a month." The boy fell silent.

Ches strained his eyes ahead across the bay. He knew he should be able to see a light at the docks now if Dan were aboard the UR2. A gleam seemed to show. It held a while as the boat sped in, then suddenly vanished.

The kid flipped a switch, and a spotlight on the bow pointed its white beam toward the dock. The beam moved slowly from left to right, lighting up the UR2, tied stern-in with its bowlines in a V to two mooring piles. Twenty-five feet to the right of the UR2 lay a glistening white sixty-five-foot Diesel cruiser. A mahogany speedboat tender was tied to the dock ahead of her.

The boy maneuvered in between the cruiser and he UR2. Ches paid the kid and jumped on the dock. The boy passed his suitcase up and waved good-by.

The boat backed away, turned, and roared off in the dark.

Ches tried to let his eyes adjust, but there was no light to adjust to. He had forgotten how black the island could be. And how cold.

As he reached for his pocket cigarette lighter, a noose slipped quietly over his head. A knee pressed into his back and the noose tightened fiercely around his neck. In less than a minute he was lying unconscious on the dock by the stern of the UR2.

He was stiff and cramped from the cold when he came around. The luminous dial on his wrist watch showed 9:30. He hadn't been out more than ten or fifteen minutes, but that was long enough for someone to get away.

He presumed that had been the idea. It was the UR2's plug-in cord of waterproof, insulated wire that had strangled him. It was still around his neck, loose and clammy. Tied tightly, it would have finished him.

His fingers shook as he unwound it. The feeble flame of his lighter gave him a brief light to find a socket, and he finally got the plug shoved in.

A light lit up in the cabin of the UR2.

Ches remembered the gleam he had thought he'd seen when coming in—the gleam that had vanished. Had a sneak thief been hiding on board? It was possible.

"But why rob the UR2, with that yacht there?" Ches asked, half aloud, as he rubbed his aching throat. He sucked in gobs of good, cold air, then jumped aboard the UR2. . . .

He almost stepped on Dan. His father lay sprawled grotesquely on his back in the cockpit close behind the two swivel fishing chairs. Ches knelt beside him and smoothed the reddish-gray hair. Dan's forehead was icy.

Ches shook him gently, saying "Dad!" as he'd done when he was small and frightened by noises in the house, or by the scratching of a raccoon stealing figs from the tree by the window. Dan had always wakened promptly.

Why didn't he wake now? Dan was indestructible. Dan could do anything better than anybody—dredge, fish, hunt, handle boats, fix a motor, pour concrete, build a house, or raise a son, acting as both father and mother.

But everything was all wrong now. Now, when Ches needed him most of all, Dan couldn't answer.

The reflected light from the cabin was dim, leaving the cockpit full of hard, black shadows. As Ches knelt in the shadows and started at Dan he began to tremble with shock and anger. He stood up slowly, numbed by the sudden thought that there

was nothing he could do. There were no police on the island. Not even a doctor, unless he could find one at the hotel.

He went below, jerked the big electric torch from its clip, and took Dan's snub-nosed .38 from the locker. He broke it, to see that all chambers were loaded, then strapped the holster onto his belt. He'd make a little law of his own, if he could find anything to build it on.

When he went back up with the torch light, vengeance had set his lips and tightened the muscles along his jaw.

The collar of Dan's windbreaker was turned up. Ches turned it down and looked at Dan's neck above the open khaki shirt he wore underneath. There was no mark of any kind, so he hadn't been strangled.

Then he noticed Dan's face. It was stiff with an appalling grimace, the mouth spread wide in a *rictus-mortis* grin. A shiver of ice gently touched the base of Ches's spine. Once in his life he had seen a man dead of snakebite. The corpse had had that grimace and that fixed, wide grin.

Involuntarily, he swept the light quickly around the deck of the cockpit, as though some lurking reptile might be hidden there; then cursed himself softly. There were corals, rattlers, and moccasins on the island, but not crawling around on a night so cold, and certainly not on board the UR2.

The dredging board, a shallow trough twelve feet long by two wide, still lay across the stern. The shells were dumped and sorted on it when the dredge basket was pulled in. The heavy basket of strap iron and meshed hardware cloth stood upright on the board, the cable attached and coiled below.

The basket and trough were still damp and smelly. Dan must have had a party of dredgers, Ches thought, and probably another party booked for the next day.

He let the light play on the space beneath the board, then turned it unwillingly back to Dan. Dan's left hand was gloved—one of the heavy, wool-lined leather gloves that he used for hauling in the cable on the dredge basket. Its mate stuck out from Dan's right-hand jacket pocket. His bare hand, palm up with the fingers half clenched, lay out-flung above his head. It gave an illusion that in the last instant of dying Dan had held some object in his hand that he was vainly trying to throw.

Ches moved the torch closer. Dan's right hand was swollen to twice its size. Ches unbuttoned the cuff on the windbreaker and the wrist of the khaki shirt and pulled them up nearly to the elbow. The swelling, blotched an ugly greenish-purple, seemed to run all the way up Dan's right arm.

Ches forced himself to open the swollen, stiffened fingers.

Sticking from the flesh at the base

of Dan's thumb was half an inch of a yellowish, hollow, barbed fang....

A car pulled out from the tunnel of trees covering the narrow road on shore and stopped by the boardwalk leading out from shore to the dock. It backed half around, lighting the boardwalk, pinioning Ches and the UR2 in the headlight's glare. A heavy-set man and a tall, slender girl in a white waterproof coat came down the path of light, keeping close together on the narrow walk.

They stopped on the dock at the stern of the UR2. The girl was Phyllis Lawson, the one Ches had phoned. Her stepfather, Nat, owned and ran Crescent Lodge. The man with Phyllis was vaguely familiar.

"Ches, what happened to you?" Phyllis's voice showed concern. "I left a note for Dan tacked to the rail, and asked you to stop by the hotel when you got in."

"I'm Otto Schrader," the man said. "I was here the year before you left."

"I remember." Ches stared at them stonily.

Otto Schrader was a barrel-chested six-footer with crew cut, round face, broad nose, and crinkly gray eyes. Ches remembered seeing him with Dr. Ernest Bullock, who owned the white Diesel cruiser at the end of the dock.

Nobody knew quite how big a fortune diminutive Doc Bullock had made from the Bullock Metal Works, but everyone knew the extent of his holdings and his undisputed sway on Crescent Island. Shells were his hobby. Head and founder of the Bullock Foundation of Natural History, he had a standing among conchologists that wasn't bought by money alone.

Ches realized suddenly that Phyllis and Otto couldn't see Dan from where they were standing. The dredging board concealed him.

"Dan may have gotten your note, Phyllis," Ches said. "I don't know. He didn't meet me. I hired a boat . . ." He told them mechanically what had happened. "When I came to after the choking, I got on board and found Dan."

"Dead?" Phyllis put the back of her hand to her mouth.

Ches nodded. "Is there a doctor at the hotel?"

"Dr. Barnes. Retired. I'll get him." Phyllis turned and ran swiftly up to shore.

Otto came on board. Ches showed him the fang in Dan's hand and told him about the light he thought he had seen on the UR2 while crossing Marlin Bay.

"Boat thief, most likely," Otto said.

"Let's go below and see if anything's missing."

Everything seemed to be in place. Compass, extinguishers, eight new life preservers, six rods with reels attached hanging from racks overhead—those were the first things a sneak thief would look for.

"Maybe the thief didn't have time," Otto suggested. "He was bound to have found Dan. If he thought he was trapped here he would be in a panic—panic enough to choke you and make a getaway." Otto trimmed and lit a cigar. The flame wasn't too steady.

"You work for Doc Bullock, don't you?" Ches asked. And when Otto nodded, Ches said, "What do you do?"

"A little bit of everything," Otto's expressionless gray eyes were searching the cabin. "Buy and sell for him. Hire and fire. Keep his accounts. Skipper his yacht, the Mirage, lying next to here, and pilot his plane." He stuck out a toe and changed the angle of the red-glowing electric heater. The cabin was growing comfortably warm. "Doc has sunk a lot of dough in this deserted yacht basin and in a development he's calling Delmar Beach Homes. Now he's even forming a syndicate to build a bridge from here to Fisher Island."

"So Doc's the bridge builder," Ches muttered. Then louder, "I didn't know he liked the island so much."

"He likes shells," Otto said. He found an ash tray and put his cigar in it. "I hate shells unless they're on a broiled live lobster. They do interest me from a point of color and industrial design. I've studied that, but I've had to kid the boss into thinking I know something more about them. Ditto for Johanna, Doc's new wife. She had all the sex appeal in the world, but she had to add some shell appeal to hook him. We even have an aquarium on the Mirage."

He brought his cigar to life again and put it back in the tray. Water lapped gently along the sides of the UR2. "Conchologists are crazy. Doc Bullock wants to be the greatest one living. He believes there are shells off the south beach of the island that have never been found. Dan had the same belief."

"He never said so to me."

"You've been away. Oil companies have had ships blasting out in the gulf here for the past two years. Making tests for oil. Dan and the boss figure some new reefs might have been uncovered. You've heard of a *gloria-maris,* haven't you?"

"The Glory-of-the-Sea? Who hasn't? The most valuable shells in the world. There aren't over a dozen in existence."

"That's because the reef they were found on in the Philippines was shaken into the sea by an earthquake over a hundred years ago." Otto put his cigar in his mouth and squinted through the smoke. "Since they've been blasting, a lot of cones have been found here on bottoms where they hadn't been found before. You know what a cone is, don't you?"

"I think I do. It's a shell shaped like a cone—pointed at one end, broad and almost flat at the other end. The opening for the marine snail, or whatever lives in it, is very narrow."

"When I first came to work for

the boss," Otto laughed, "I didn't even know shells were alive. Anyway, the *gloria-maris*—the Glory-of-the-Sea—is a cone," Otto continued. "As I said, Dan and the boss both believed that some day one might be dredged up here." He put out his cigar, mushrooming the end in the tray. "Is Dan's logbook here? Didn't he keep a record of what happened every day?"

"He had to—for income tax." Ches reached in a locker drawer, then pulled it wide open. "That's funny." He went up forward and checked a couple of drawers in the galley. "It's gone."

"Have you looked in Dan's pockets?"

"It's too big for that."

"Maybe you have the answer to your garroting boat thief."

"Why would he want to take Dan's logbook?"

Otto didn't answer. He was pointing a shaking finger toward the waste can by the galley sink. His gray eyes were wide with a look that was close to terror.

Warmed by the rays of the heater, a cone shell had appeared from behind the waste can. It was slithering along on the matting, propelling its four-inch length of startling brown and yellow beauty by some unseen source of living locomotion. Its progress was hypnotic, evil, like the stealthy attack of a tiny hunchbacked gnome.

Ches bent forward and reached out to grab it. At the same instant Otto leaned across the table and fastened his hand in Ches's red hair to fling him back hard against the cushions.

"Don't touch it!" Otto shouted. "I've heard stories in Ceylon and Australasia of shells more deadly than a cobra. Get a tablespoon and drop that cone in boiling water, and then check with Emily Wininger, who knows a lot about shells that I don't. That might possibly be the little killer that murdered Dan!" . . .

It wasn't more than three miles from the dock to Crescent Lodge; two miles of bumpy, washboard road of crushed shell straight across the island to the ocean, and another mile of slightly worse road that ran east along the beach until it wound through a narrow, twisting, tree-lined drive to the hotel.

Crescent Lodge comprised a main hall that housed the dining room, recreation lounge, and office, and twenty or more guest cottages, comfortably furnished but needing paint and repair. Nat Lawson, Phyllis's stepfather and the owner of the lodge, was constantly talking improvements, but the money for them never seemed to come along.

Doc Bullock, a guest of the lodge for years, had finally given up and built a ranch-type home close by the hotel.

Nat Lawson, who hid an acidulous, crabbed disposition under a fine veneer of camaraderie toward paying guests, considered the building of Doc's house a personal af-

front. He was even more outraged when Emily Wininger, the widow of a famous conchologist, came to Crescent Island and built a cottage, with a shell and gift shop, on a plot of ground that Doc gave her, next to his house. In two short years, through her knowledge, charm, and graciousness, Emily had drawn all the trade from the shell shop Nat ran in the hotel.

Phyllis was back with Dr. Barnes in less than thirty minutes, but her suppressed excitement hadn't escaped Nat and Doc Bullock and a few other guests chatting in the hotel lounge.

Dr. Barnes, a nervous little man with thinning white hair, examined Dan and tried to hide his puzzlement by saying, "Fantastic! But there's nothing I can do. There'll have to be an inquest tomorrow. I'll attend if I'm needed. Fantastic!"

The doctor was scarcely on his feet with his knees brushed off when Doc Bullock's long, black car rolled into the space cleared for parking close to the jetty.

Doc, and a tall-dark-haired woman Ches guessed was Doc's new wife, stopped on the dock to talk briefly to Dr. Barnes and Phyllis, who had just stepped from the UR2 to drive Dr. Barnes back to the hotel.

When Doc and his wife got aboard, Doc spoke first to Otto and then crossed to Dan's body. He turned back the sheet and looked with an expressionless face at the corpse.

Standing over him, looking down, Johanna gave a frightened moan and clutched her white wool coat about her with shaking hands. Doc replaced the sheet and turned to snap at his tall wife: "It's bad enough without histrionics, Johanna. Go over to the Mirage and fix some coffee. I'll send Otto up to get Emily."

Doc pulled the boat in without waiting for her answer and helped her ashore.

"Just Emily, Boss?" Otto asked as he prepared to follow.

Doc's teeth flashed under his small black mustache. "Did I ask for anyone else? Ches isn't running a side show."

Finally he turned to Ches when Otto had gone. "I'm sorry, Ches," he said, and his voice was softer. "I can't figure it. That fang in Dan's hand may mean danger for everyone around here. I think Emily may be able to identify what kind of shellfish it came from. Let's see the creature." They went below.

Ches dumped the boiling water out and slid the shell gently onto a paper towel on the table. Doc turned on the flash and brought the light close.

"I've seen a lot of shells since I was a kid," Ches said. "Nothing like that."

"It belongs to the Toxoglossa." Doc straightened up. "I've read of them but I've never seen one. They're not found here, or haven't

been up to this time, as far as I know."

"Could this one have been found here—dredged up by Dan?" Ches asked thoughtfully. "Is that possible?"

"Anything's possible in shelling," Doc told him. "If this cone was found on the bottom around here, a *gloria-maris* might be found here some time. Cowries, even, and other great treasures of the sea so far only found in Ceylon, the Philippines, the Red Sea, and Australasia." He sat down and poked at the cone with a gold pencil.

Ches took a seat opposite and tried to get some inkling of Doc's real reflections from his black eyes. "If Dan didn't dredge that cone up today, where did he get it?" Ches asked suddenly.

"Emily Wininger can tell you that better than I can." Doc restored the gold pencil to his pocket. "Let's stick to the idea that he dredged it up—until we find out we're wrong. You don't think Dan was murdered, do you?"

"I don't know what I think. I only know he's dead and that I was choked on the dock here when I landed." Ches repeated his story again and finished with: "Dan's logbook is gone. That's all."

Doc slid nimbly out from behind the table. "Can you stand another quick look at your father?"

Ches nodded miserably. They went back up into the cockpit, and Ches stood holding the light while Doc Bullock's short, agile fingers probed around in Dan's graying red hair.

Doc beckoned Ches silently to kneel and feel an obvious lump above Dan's right ear. For an instant Ches let the light rest on the fishing chair close to Dan's head, then they pulled up the sheet and went back below.

"We haven't much time before Emily gets here," Doc said, drawing a circle on the table with his finger. "You can take your choice, Ches—accident or murder. If Dan dredged up that cone, then he started to examine it after he docked here, and it struck him like a snake. He fell and hit his head."

"And the other choice?" Ches asked.

"The other choice isn't so nice," Doc said after a moment. "Somebody struck Dan over the head and shoved that cone in his hand to bite him. First-degree murder. Right now it seems to lack any motive whatever."

"Then you think it was an accident?" Ches leaned closer across the table.

Doc nodded.

"Maybe you can tell me who went out dredging with Dan today?"

"Nobody," Doc said. "I had the UR2 chartered, but I had to cancel for business reasons. I paid Dan, anyhow. He said he was going out by himself."

"Why?" Ches persisted. "He hated dredging; dragging that

bucket up, ruining the paint on the transom, messing up everything with mud and smells. Why should he go out all alone?"

"He'd found a new reef uncovered by oil blasting," Doc said. "He was looking for a *gloria-maris*. It's my fault, I guess. I can buy one for a couple of thousand dollars, probably, but I want to prove my theory that they may be found off Crescent. Two weeks ago I offered fifty thousand dollars cash for the first Glory-of-the-Sea dredged up off of Florida."

"So, instead of a fortune, Dan dredged up death," Ches said.

"I'm afraid that's the answer." Doc got out from behind the table. "Two cars just drove in. I guess the rush has started. I'd appreciate it, Ches, if you'd leave the money details of this tragedy to me. I was fond of Dan."

"I'll manage," Ches said. "When I find I'm stuck I may have to borrow. Until then—thanks, anyhow." . . . .

Otto had brought Emily Wininger back with him; and Nat Lawson, with his usual cold persistence, had attached himself firmly to Phyllis and had come along in her car.

Ches liked Emily Wininger right away. She wasn't much more than thirty, he decided. Smart in a knitted dress of dark blue. Her hair was light brown with a touch of copper, her mouth wide and sensitive with even, white teeth. Her violet-blue eyes were intelligent and full of animation. She greeted Ches with a handclasp that took some of his pain away, and said, emphatically, "I know how you feel!"

Even Nat Lawson, tall, impeccable in his grooming, and about as friendly as a hungry barracuda, seemed to thaw slightly at the sight of Dan. "Sorry you had to come back to this, Ches," he said, putting two degrees more warmth than usual into the clasp of his limp hand. "Seems that's the way things go sometimes, y'know."

Doc immediately took command: "Let's get over to my yacht. There are things I want to do."

On board Doc's yacht, the Mirage, Ches had to admit that at least Doc ran things well, but at the sight of Johanna without her white coat he began to wonder if Doc ran everything. There was something of the gypsy about Johanna, a rebellion against convention.

She seemed utterly unconscious of her black velvet toreador trousers and brilliant red blouse, both tailored to every inch of her provocative body, and of the round gold earrings that swung with every movement of her head—a head that belonged on an Indian princess.

Doc Bullock turned quickly and switched on the motor supplying power to the ship-to-shore phone.

"This is the yacht Mirage calling the Tampa Marine Operator—the yacht Mirage calling the Tampa Marine Operator—can you read me?"

After minutes of listening to the

raucous babble of shrimpers, Doc cut through by placing a "May Day" call to the Coast Guard, the emergency call that sweeps everything else from the air.

It was quickly arranged that an ambulance be sent over for Dan's body as soon as possible on a chartered ferry.

Doc swung around from the phone and looked at Emily. She was sitting, consuming a second cup of coffee as she stared at the cone.

"Well, what is it?" What's the answer?" he asked her nervously. "You know more about shells than anyone on this island."

"Why don't you consult Professor Andersen?" Emily asked hesitantly. "Otto speaks German as well as I do. Andersen knows more about shells than anyone else living."

"You ask him," Otto said. "The old fool shot at the last boat that put in there without invitation. I'm not going to get my head blown off paying Andersen a call."

"Oh, quit stalling, Emily," Nat broke out irritably from his seat on the cabin divan. "Could that cone have killed Ches's father or couldn't it? You're the logical one to tell us."

"All right, see how you like it," Emily said with a touch of anger. "That creature, with its gorgeous fabric marking, is the terror-of-the-sea. I've seen two people struck down by them on the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. They both died in less than five minutes, in front of my eyes, while my husband and I stood there helpless to save them. That cone has a poison sac in its proboscis, and not one fang, but three. Its sac is filled with neurotoxic poison, and it has force enough back of it to squirt it two inches out of its fang. Take a good look at it. That, my friends, is a Cloth-of-Gold. The deadliest, fastest killer known to science—the textile cone!" . . .

The ambulance arrived after midnight, brought over from the mainland on Doc's chartered ferry. Ches watched the twin taillights vanish taking Dan's body away, and some great part of his life went with it.

Ches had been sitting in the dark cabin of the UR2 for an hour or more, far too weary to undress, and too depressed to drive home and face the big, empty house alone. The lights on the Mirage were out, and Ches was certain he could hear Otto's snore.

There was a scratching in the cockpit. Ches found that his muscles refused to move. His brain was obsessed with a horrible thought: Suppose Dan had dredged up two of those cones, maybe more!

The scratching sounded again, bringing back the dreadful picture of that abominable Cloth-of-Gold dragging itself toward him across the cabin floor.

"Ches!" His name was called no louder than the hiss of a snake, but it broke the net of tautened nerves that was holding him rigid. He unbolted the cabin door.

A moment later Phyllis and Emily Wininger had come below. Emily reached up and closed both sides of the double door. "Keep the lights off," she said in a low voice. "I don't want to wake Otto. Phyllis and I just drove back from Professor Andersen's. There was a light on in his workroom. We called and blew the horn, but got no answer. We didn't dare try the gate in that electric fence."

Phyllis said, "Ches, Emily thinks the old man is dead. I have the same feeling that something's terribly wrong."

"Do you know the old man very well?" Ches asked Emily.

"I've been there once, that's all. He consulted me about a book he's writing on conchology. He was polite, but cold as charity. He gave me the creeps. He's keeping hungry crocodiles in the old swimming pool —preserving *Crocodilus americanus* found in lower Florida."

A muscle twitched in Ches's jaw. "Why are you worried about a character like that?"

"Because I think that cone that killed your father was flown in from Australia and kept alive in a heated aquarium," Emily said. "It's far too cold here for poisonous cones, Ches. There are only two heated aquariums on this island. One's on the Mirage—that big, oval glass tank in the cockpit."

"But you don't think Doc or Otto is keeping textile cones in there?"

"No. That's why I want to check with the professor before I say anything to anyone but you and Phyllis. Andersen has the only other heated aquarium. I want to find out if he's okay."

"He might have been asleep," Ches said. "Has he a telephone?"

"No phone."

Dan's .38 was dragging heavily at Ches's hip. "What do you want to do?"

"Nat's rowboat is at the end of the dock," Phyllis said. "How long would it take us to row across from here to Harbor Point?"

"It's two good miles," Ches said. "Half an hour if the tide's with us. Longer if it's against us. If you're figuring on landing at Andersen's dock I think it's taking an awful chance, from what I've heard."

"I'll take the risk," Emily said. "The old man's eccentric, but he's not crazy enough to shoot anyone—if he's still alive. I'd like to see."

Ches said, "I still think it's nuts, but let's make it simple. Dan's car is up in the parking place. There should be an outboard motor in the trunk."

"There's one on Nat's boat," Phyllis told him. "I thought the noise would wake Otto."

"We'll row out along the shore before we start the motor," Ches said. "Commercial fishermen are out on the bay here at all sorts of hours. Even if Otto wakes he'll think nothing of it."

The oars dipped in with scarcely more noise than the splash of jump-

ing mullet. Between the boat and the mass of mangrove roots gone crazy that formed the shore, a strip of water showed leaden black merging into gray.

Ches dipped and pulled for endless minutes, his weary arms falling into a slow, monotonous pattern. When he judged the dock was half a mile from them, he started the outboard.

Ten minutes later Ches cut the motor and took to the oars again. A few minutes of silent rowing, and Emily turned on a flashlight in the bow. The beam picked up the narrow pier with Andersen's twenty-foot open boat moored beside it. If any light was on in the house it couldn't be seen from where they were.

Ches nosed in easily beside the twenty-footer until the rowboat's bow was almost under the pier.

Emily started to climb out onto the dock, but Ches ordered her sharply to to wait. "I think before you get up on there you'd better call out and tell him who you are."

Holding the boat in with one hand as she stood in the bow, Emily turned the flashlight toward the house and yelled, "Professor! Professor Andersen! It's Emily Wininger. Are you all right, Professor?"

The flashlight moved along metal shutters, partly open, that walled in the whole of a wide front porch. Ches caught his breath and shoved the rowboat smartly away from the twenty-footer, almost causing Emily to fall. Sticking from between one of the open jalousies was the muzzle of a shotgun.

"Professor!" Emily called again, a little wildly, and followed with a stream of German.

Ches jerked the cord of the outboard motor. Blinding floodlights went on, bringing pier and boats into stark relief. The engine caught and scooted the rowboat underneath the pier and out the other side. The shotgun blasted three times, peppering Andersen's twenty-footer and filling the water with tiny geysers.

Sound bounced wildly around Marlin Bay, bringing up a flight of white birds from their slumber. The floodlights went off. The noise of the outboard took possession of everything. They made it back across the bay in another twenty-minute run.

Otto, in a heavy wool bathrobe and fleece-lined slippers, was waiting for them at the dock to help them land. "What's the commotion?" he asked.

Ches said, "Emily got worried about Professor Andersen. He welcomed us with a shotgun."

The only way to call on Adolph is in an armored tank," Otto said. "I told you that earlier."

"I'm still worried about him," Emily said, as she and Phyllis started off the dock to her car. "Now I think he's gone completely crazy." . . .

Ches tossed around in the bunk until dawn touched the bay and a troubled sleep blotted out the mem-

ory of Dan and of Andersen's blasting shotgun.

He was up the mainland, tired and unrefreshed, in time to catch the first ferry over to pick up the secondhand car he'd parked at the ferry landing, and drive to the county hospital. After a short wait he was introduced to Dr. Bascomb, who had performed an autopsy on Dan. Apparently, on the doctor's report, the authorities were satisfied that the cause of death was the sting of a shell not usually found in Florida waters.

If Ches would sign the papers, Dan's body would be released to the mortician. An inquest wouldn't be necessary, although the poison was one the doctor had never encountered before. It was obvious, Dr. Bascomb's said, that death was accidental.

Ches gazed steadily at Dr. Bascomb's well-tanned face and iron-gray hair. "Why is it obvious my father's death was accidental?" Ches asked him. "Did you examine the bump behind his ear?"

"Naturally, young man, since I performed an autopsy. The poison that killed your father is fast-working—paralyzing all the faculties quickly. Our opinion is that your father fell after he was bitten. The bump was caused from striking his head in that fall. Any other opinion is a matter for the sheriff's office to investigate. If you have direct evidence, of course—"

"I haven't," Ches said. He signed the papers and gave the doctor the dead textile cone. From the hospital Ches called the mortician, and found the burial was set for the following day.

He sat in the car for a while, sweating as the sun moved higher. What could he tell the sheriff if he went to see him?

A boat thief, panicked at finding Dan's body, had choked Ches when he landed. Dan's logbook was missing. "Stolen?" the sheriff was bound to ask. Ches didn't know. He hadn't even searched at home. An irascible old man, known to be jittery, had fired on intruders trying to land at his dock at two in the morning. These items, looked at in the blazing light of day, made a fine collection of absolutely nothing.

Ches started the car and drove north toward the city. In a couple of miles, red signs on a square white building advertised: "Gino Di Marco—Shell Curios." A larger sign invited tourists to see the "Glory-of-the-Sea."

Ches went inside and elbowed his way up to a thick glass case where Di Marco's rare *gloria-maris* lay in solitary splendor. It was certainly bringing in the business. The entire history of Di Marco's shell was on a printed card beside it: where it was found, when, and the collector who had sold it to Di Marco.

Looking at it, Ches didn't find it very exciting. It was about the size of the textile cone, four inches long. A fine network of orange-brown

lines enclosed triangular spaces. Over all this were three unequal bands, made up of tiny deep-chestnut blotches.

The blotches of the Cloth-of-Gold that had killed Dan were yellowish and brown. The three unequal bands were on the textile cone, too, but on a white ground. The textile cone also was divided into triangular patches, but the lines were browner than those of the Glory-of-the-Sea.

Ches asked the cashier for the manager. A few minutes later he was seated in Gino Di Marco's cluttered office telling his story. The tall, olive-skinned Di Marco heard him through, watching Ches with brilliant eyes that grew steadily more troubled.

"The morning papers carried the story of Dan's death," Di Marco said when Ches had finished. "I liked Dan. I wish I could help you."

"Can't you? I only want to know if you agree with Emily Wininger when she says Dan couldn't have dredged up that textile cone."

"It's fatal to have opinions in this racket," Di Marco said. "Tomorrow somebody proves you're wrong and, phfft!—you're out of business."

"I'm not hunting publicity—for me or you." Ches's lips were tight and thin. "I'm trying to find out the truth about how my father died. If I get it, nobody will know where it came from."

Di Marco got up, locked the office door, and sat down again. His long-lashed eyes were gentle. "You listen to Emily Wininger," he said. "Nobody ever dredged up a textile cone around here—nor any of the Toxoglossa. Those cones don't live in these parts, and never will. . . . Now, since you say you can keep your mouth shut, I'll tell you something about Professor Adolph Andersen—and why he hides out like a hibernating bear. This is only my opinion, of course. If you quote me, I'll deny it flatly."

"I'm not quoting anyone."

"Good," Di Marco said. "Did you see that *gloria-maris* out there?"

Ches nodded.

"It has a history with it. Where it came from and how I got it. I paid two thousand for it. Anyone can find out, if they want to take the trouble. There are only twelve in existence. None has been found in a hundred years." His eyes narrowed. "One of the twelve is missing."

"Missing?" Ches's forehead wrinkled.

"Yes," Di Marco said. "The finest specimen of them all. It was stolen from a museum in New York over a year ago. The museum sent out leaflets to every other museum and shell collector in the world, giving exact coloring and dimensions. They've never found it." He paused, tapping his long fingers on the desk top. "I think they'll find it when Professor Adolph Andersen dies and his private collection goes up for sale."

"You mean you think Andersen stole it?" Ches's disbelief was plain.

"I think it's more likely he bought it from the thief, with no questions asked. And I think the thief knew exactly where he was going to sell it before he robbed the museum."

"But why? He couldn't even show it to anyone."

Di Marco gave a slow, sad smile. "Andersen doesn't want to show it to anyone. He doesn't even want to talk to anyone or see anyone. He's one of the few real, old-type scientists living, Ches. He has no sense of property values, no love of people. If he wanted a shell for scientific research, I firmly believe he'd kill to get it."

"I'm going to get in there," Ches said firmly. "I'll see if he has that *gloria-maris* and find out if he's raising those textile cones."

"The museum has already had someone in there," Di Marco said. "She found out nothing."

"She?"

Di Marco nodded. "Emily Wininger."

Ches went out into the sunshine with a swimming head. He decided to stay in town for the night at a hotel and to phone Phyllis in the morning. Dan would have wanted a simple burial.

They buried Dan the next afternoon. Ches and Phyllis caught the last ferry home to the island, and Phyllis waved through tears as she drove off.

From the ferry landing, close to the lighthouse on Star Point, a single asphalt highway split the island for ten miles east and west. It was the only paved road on Crescent. All the houses on the long, narrow island were reached by graded shell roads leading off it through trees to left and right. The ocean lay south, to the left of the highway. To the right, a few roads led due north to houses built on filled-in land in the mangrove swamp that bordered San Carlos Bay.

Ches took the first right-hand shell road, a mile up the highway from the ferry. It led past Preston's Dock and General Store and terminated two miles farther on at the fence around Professor Andersen's laboratory.

The next right-hand road up the highway led to Ches's house. Two miles beyond that a left turn led to the beach and Crescent Lodge, and a right turn led through the swamp to the docks on Marlin Bay.

Ches stopped at the store, the only one serving the island. He had picked up some groceries and was checking out when Gene Preston, the owner, said, "Dan left a film to be developed just before we closed at six, night before last. He stopped at the dock in the UR2 on his way in from dredging. The prints came back on the mailboat today." Preston took a yellow envelope from under the counter and gave it to Ches.

"Thanks, Gene." Ches picked up the envelope and his bag of groceries. Outside, on the porch of the

store, where the light was better, he set his groceries down to look at the snapshots.

There were eight pictures in the envelope. He went over them a second time. They were close-ups of a shell set against a screen measured off in inches to give an accurate comparative size. They had been shot from eight different angles. The markings on the shell looked similar to those on the Glory-of-the-Sea that Ches had seen at Di Marco's, but Ches couldn't be sure from the black-and-white snapshots.

He was conscious of someone breathing down his neck. Ches shoved the pictures back in the envelope, and whirled abruptly on Nat Lawson.

"You're jumpy," Nat said. "I'm sorry if I startled you."

"Yes, I'm jumpy," Ches said. "Low, too. Dan was buried this afternoon."

"I know," Nat said. "It's rugged. As a matter of fact, I've just left the Bullocks and Otto up at your house. We've been trying to straighten things up a little for you. I had a bit of luck today. I'll let Doc tell you. Coming?"

"I'll follow," Ches said, swallowing a quick resentment. He'd wanted to see the house for the first time with Phyllis, or alone.

Trailing Nat's car, Ches had an unpleasant feeling that fate had thrust an answer to everything straight into his hands and that his mind was too tangled to grasp the meaning.

Dan had always despised picture-takers!

Dan had never owned a camera in his life, as far as Ches knew! ...

Doc Bullock, seldom still, paced from living room to kitchen and back again. "This may not be the time to bring this up, Ches, but something happened today out dredging that I know is of vital interest to you. Certainly of vital interest to everyone on the island." Doc stopped in back of Nat Lawson's chair. "Show him, Nat."

Nat picked up an ordinary one-pound candy box from the floor beside him. He took off the lid and handed the box to Ches.

"Fifty thousand dollars!" Nat said as Ches stared down at a four-inch cone on a bed of cotton. "It's a Glory-of-the-Sea! I dredged it up today."

A glance had told Ches that it was a Glory-of-the-Sea. He had studied the *gloria-maris* over at Gino Di Marco's too carefully to ever mistake that network of orange-brown lines enclosing those triangular spaces. Almost automatically he started to reach for the pictures in his pocket.

The feel of Nat's eyes, watching so closely, stopped him. Later, Ches thought, he'd check with Emily Wininger about the kind of shell that had been photographed with such care. One thing was certain:

Those pictures weren't of the *gloria-maris* lying in the box he was holding. Not if Nat had dredged it up that day.

"Is it alive?" Ches asked fatuously.

"It was when it came up in the dredge bucket on Nat's turn." Doc Bullock lit a thin black cigar. "Very much alive. Nat grabbed it as it started to crawl away. He's killed it with formaldehyde. I'm paying him his money tomorrow, when he gets the shell cleaned out."

"Well, you should have enough for some paint and new plumbing in the cottages now, Nat," Ches said.

Nat flushed and his lean face hardened. "I'm not putting a nickel of this fifty thousand into the hotel, Ches. Not the way things are now. Everybody in business here has gone broke since you've been away. Emily's about to lose her shell shop. Most of the motels are in hock to their ears, and I'm over fifty thousand in debt. Unless—"

"Unless what?" Ches sat down.

"Unless Doc builds a bridge over here from Fisher Island, I'm getting out," Nat said, "and taking Phyllis with me if she wants to go. Tourists are passing us by. The ferries can't bring enough people over in a day to support half a hotel, and we have only a two-month season. Finding this *gloria-maris* won't help if there isn't a bridge here to let tourists, shellers, and fishermen come in and get out when they want to."

"From what I hear," Ches said slowly, "it seems that Dan was sort of standing in the way of this bridge."

"That was something I didn't intend to bring up now," Doc Bullock said, with an air of irritation. "But since Nat has shot his mouth off out of turn, I'll tell you the truth. We have approval from the Army and the Navy, but that bridge can't be built unless you sell this place to us for a right of way from Harbor Point to the highway."

"Did you make Dan an offer?"

"Not a definite amount," Doc said. "Dan had intimated that there wasn't enough money to make him sell, but he did say he'd talk it over with you when you got home."

Ches started to speak, but Doc cut him off with a raised hand. "I'm going to make you an offer now, and it takes everything into consideration: your feelings for your father, your natural love of this place he built, and my own heavy investments here that will go down the drain without this bridge. You have sixty acres in this plot, Ches. I'll pay you thirty thousand dollars cash for house and land. Five hundred dollars an acre." Doc stood up. "You don't need to answer now. Take your time and think it over."

Ches stood up, too. "It's been

thought over for me, Doc," he said, with a trace of sadness. "Thought over by all the old-timers on the island, and by Dan. Answer me one question: What brought you here in the first place? There are many better places in the world for shelling and fishing. Why did you come here?"

"Peace, I guess," Doc said after a moment. "Peace and quiet."

"Thanks," Ches said. "Build your bridge, and Crescent will be a caboose on the mainland honky-tonk train. Your peace and quiet will be gone, and you'll be gone with it, looking for some other peaceful spot to develop."

"Maybe you're right," Doc said with a wistful smile. "Maybe you're not. The point is you don't intend to sell?"

"I'm leaving it open," Ches said. "Right this minute I feel like Dan. I dont think I will sell." . . .

An hour later, as Ches was pacing through the lonely house, Phyllis drove up. She came in, looking cool in her white tailored slacks and green silk blouse. Ches's memory flowed back to all their wonderful days together, before he went away. He took her in his arms suddenly and kissed her. She responded after an instant, holding him closely. She was flushed and a little breathless when he finally released her.

"Well!" She patted her dark hair into place. "I know it's unfair, but I've been feeling like a piece of furniture since you got back." She made quick repairs to her lipstick and stood away from him, smiling. "I hear we're rich," she said. "Nat tells me that Doc offered you thirty thousand for the place here."

For a moment anger flashed through Ches, then his body sagged wearily. "Phyllis, listen." There was a desperate plea in his tone. "Everything that Dan has built here—paneling, tiling, woodwork—was done at night when every muscle in him was crying for rest. Nothing was bought or built for himself—it was for me, and a hope he had that some day it would belong to us, and to his grandchildren.

"Let me show you something, darling." Ches took her hand and pulled her to sit beside him at Dan's desk.

A few minutes later Dan's checkbook and a formidable pile of unpaid bills lay on the table before them. The balance in the checkbook showed five hundred dollars. The unpaid bills totaled well over twelve hundred dollars.

"There it is," Ches said. "Dan was broke—yet he flatly refused to sell this place at any price. Do you think I should let him down?"

"He'd worked hard all his life, hadn't he?" Phyllis said in a soft voice. "He was a fine workman. A good man."

"The best," Ches said.

"And this is a good place to live," she said.

"The best."

"But not a good place to make a living," her quiet, ruthless voice went on. "Dan was broke. You just finished showing me figures." She tapped the bills and checkbook. "Nat's lived here all his life. So have you. So have I. We have nothing except what may come from a few tourists. You can say it's Nat's fault. What about Dan? Us? Emily Wininger? She had money when she came here. She's gone broke in a few years. What sort of shape are the commercial fishermen in?"

Ches was staring at her with incredulity. She was tearing all of his castles down, telling him things he didn't want to hear. "You want me to sell this?" He waved a hand across the room. "Our home that Dan built for us. You want me to turn Crescent into another carnival island by letting Doc build a bridge over here?"

"No, I don't." She moved a little nearer, then restrained herself. "I want to marry a man who will face the facts, Ches; a man with the strength to realize that he may be wrong. You may be the one who is wrecking the island by hanging on to a dream."

She kissed him lightly. "I'm leaving now. Whichever way the wind blows, I've decided to marry you in June."

Ches went out on the porch and watched her car drive away. It was hot and airless. Mosquitoes sang outside the screen. The patch of light that spilled out from the living-room window was weak, a poor tool to chisel a hole in darkness as hard as ebony.

He went back in to sit at the table and face the bills. He knew Phyllis was right. Nat stood to lose his hotel in spite of the money for the *gloria-maris*. Emily could lose her shell shop and her home. Doc Bullock stood to drop a fortune, more than all of them put together, even though he could better afford it.

A bridge was the answer, undoubtedly.

Ches rested his chin in his cupped hands. His teeth were clenched and his face was white. Dan had known everything that Phyllis had said, yet he had adamantly refused to sell. Also, Dan hadn't lived to discuss it with Ches.

Ches banged his fist on the desk. He seemed to have plenty of motives now—too many suspects. Everyone on the island was a suspect. Someone had refused to accept ruination and had ended Dan's stubbornness.

"Let's see what they'll do to *me* now," Ches muttered. "I'm sitting tight. Nobody's going to buy this place for a million until I settle with the one who killed Dan."

Yet he still had no proof that Dan had been murdered.

He took the snapshots from his pocket, spread them out impatiently on the table, and moved the lamp

closer. More questions jumped out at him:

Where had Dan gotten the film if he hadn't taken the pictures himself? The answer to that was comparatively easy. The kid running the boat had supplied it unwittingly when he'd mentioned that Dan had been taking groceries to Professor Andersen twice a month on the UR2. Andersen must have asked Dan to have the film developed for him.

Were the pictures of eight different shells, or were all the pictures of one shell? Ches measured the shell against the calibrated screen that formed the background in each picture. Just one shell, it seemed. Checked by the screen, the dimensions were the same no matter what the position of the shell.

Was it a *gloria-maris?* He thought so, but he was far from sure. As exhausted as he was, he almost got in his car to drive to Emily's and ask her.

Then he recalled Gino Di Marco's suspicions that Prof. Adolph Andersen was hiding the *gloria-maris* stolen from the New York museum.

Ches found his conjectures moving off in another direction. Suppose Emily Wininger had stolen the *gloria-maris* from the museum and sold it to Professor Andersen. Then Andersen had received a leaflet from the museum and photographed the *gloria-maris* to see if it really was the stolen treasure.

Ches determined to confront the professor with the pictures first thing in the morning. He would find some way of getting to the old man.

He shoved the prints and negatives back in the envelope and left them on the table. The bills and checkbook he put back in the drawer.

A breeze sprang up, announcing itself by a restless rustle of the palm trees. Ashes were swirling from the tray piled high with his cigarettes, so he dumped the tray in a wastebasket.

He undressed and took a shower, letting the lather and hot water soften cramped muscles and quiet his jumping nerves.

Thirty thousand dollars! He was a perfect fool!

He switched off all the lights and lay down on his bed, letting the blackness talk to him.

"Murder or accident?" the darkness kept asking. "Who? Who?"

"Who-wooh!"

That was a screech owl in one of the palms. Ches punched his pillow and buried his face. The blackness quit talking. An hour later he slipped from the bed and took Dan's gun from its holster. The wind had risen. The rustle of the palms had become a clatter. The back screen door had slammed sharply. He waited. It slammed again.

He stepped into the living room, his bare feet soundless, switched on

the light by the bedroom door, and said, "Who's there!" It sounded silly. He felt worse—asinine, simple. He closed a couple more windows tighter, hooked the screen door, and went back to bed.

It was ten past two when he woke again, clutching his throat and coughing madly to get a little air. He could see the luminous hands on the alarm clock, but nothing else. The room was full of strangulation, denser and blacker than any night air.

Then, while he fought to breathe, the living room turned pink and red. In the corner of his own room a pinkish-blue tongue stuck out through the wall. It came back, vanished, mocked at him again.

His bare feet blistered when they touched the floor. He found his boat shoes and pulled them on. There was an extinguisher in the kitchen, but a look through the door of the living room told him he'd never make it. He felt himself tottering. To make anywhere now was touch and go.

A falling timber crashed loud somewhere. He jerked a blanket from the bed, wrapped his head, and made the casement window on the opposite side of his room. That, at least, was away from the darting red tongue in the corner. With a hunting knife from the bureau drawer he slashed the screen. He twisted the crank until half the window was open and started to squeeze himself out head-first.

He didn't remember getting through.

When he recovered, wrapped in a blanket, scorched and bleeding, Phyllis was kneeling beside him. Everyone else on the island was there, but nothing was more scarce on Crescent than water. Outside of keeping the fire from spreading through the tinder brush and palm trees, there was nothing they could do.

Ches lay, holding tight to Phyllis's hand, and watched his house burn down. Once he grinned wryly and said, "I might have started that fire with an ash tray dumped in the wastebasket, but I don't think so. It's going to be a little cramped setting up housekeeping on the UR2 in June."

"With thirty thousand dollars we can have a pretty nice house built by then." Phyllis squeezed his hand.

"If I'm alive," Ches said. "No skunk is going to murder Dan and burn me out and make me sell something I dont want to. Thirty million won't buy this ash heap now until I dig out the truth about Dan." . . .

Two fruitless days of balmy perfect weather went by. Ches stowed his few remaining articles of clothing on board the UR2, and spent some time lying on deck with binoculars, watching Andersen's

house on Harbor Point. Blankets and sheets were hung out one day. The next day they were gone.

Double checking, Ches talked with the postman who delivered mail on the island. Apparently Professor Andersen had received a letter and a magazine the day before. Ches drove down to Andersen's mailbox to take a look, and found the box was empty. He couldn't see much point in talking to Andersen, even if he could get in, since the pictures had gone up in smoke along with everything else.

On the second evening Doc came aboard to ask if the UR2 was back in business again. "Our dredging trip with the speedboat cured me, even if we did get a Glory-of-the-Sea. It's going to cost me five hundred to have her revarnished and put in shape again."

"She's built for play, Doc, not work," Ches grinned. "Sure, I'm back in business. Food's getting low and I need new clothes. No insurance on the house. When do you want to go?"

"Tomorrow morning," Doc said. "Nat and Phyllis, Emily and Otto, Johanna and me. Can you handle us all?"

"Easy."

"Good," Doc said. "I want to try dredging the same place where Nat pulled up that Glory-of-the-Sea." He put a hand on Ches's arm. "You must feel a little better to know that textile cone was dredged up by Dan. It must have been since we found a *gloria-maris*. Where you find one, you may find the other. The sea around us is mysterious, Ches."

"Very," Ches agreed.

Doc jumped ashore. "I'll pay you a hundred dollars for the day." He turned on the dock to say, "The offer for your land still stands." . . .

The UR2 stuck her nose out past Harbor Point. A chop hit her on the starboard bow, spattering spray against the windshield. Ches cut the motors down.

"What you think?" Otto was standing beside him at the wheel. "Is it too rough to dredge?"

Ches cocked an eye at the sky. "We'll be okay if the women can take it. Uncomfortable, that's all. Charter boats always spend every good day tied up to the dock."

"The women can always duck in the cabin." Otto stuck his head down the booby hatch. "How about coffee, one of you three. It's cold up here."

Johanna came up with coffee. She looked charming, smiling over the collar of a red leather zip-up jacket. "I didn't put any cream in yours, Otto. You don't need calories."

Emily Wininger, in heavy blue denim slacks with a scarf around her head, interrupted to hold out six broom straws clutched tightly in her first. "Let's draw and get it over with. Longest straw gets the contents of the first basket pulled

up, and so on in rotation. We hold that same turn all day."

"You only need five straws, Emily," Otto said. "I'm pulling up the dredge while Ches handles the boat."

"Now, wait—" Ches began.

"Great guns!" Otto broke in. "You haven't even got gloves with you. That cable will murder your hands. Ask the boss. I enjoy the labor. It helps me work off too much beer."

"Let him," Doc said. "He's too fat now."

The straws gave Doc the contents of the first haul. Then came Emily, Johanna, and Phyllis. Nat had the last, with the shortest straw.

"What's the difference?" he said to Doc. "I'm just as likely to pull up another Glory-of-the-Sea as you."

"But not," Doc said, "as likely to get another fifty thousand from me!"

A few spots within a nebulous area fifteen miles long by four wide on the chart are marked "Sft M Sh" or "Hrd S Sh." That, any guide will be glad to tell you, means "soft mud and shell" or "hard sand and shell," indicating what you will find on the bottom. That is, presuming you are lucky enough or skillful enough to find the spot.

There aren't any street signs on the Gulf of Mexico. Since a boat the size of the UR2, if marked on the chart, would show up with all the relative intensity of a fly speck on the Empire State Building, several neat bits of calculation are necessary before a dredge is let down.

Nat watched sullenly as Ches made penciled lines on the chart. Finally he said, "Run on until those palms are just abaft the starboard running light. That'll hit it."

"Ches is handling the boat," Emily said tightly.

"Suit yourself," Nat said. "I was the one who pulled up the jackpot shell, if you care to remember, and the one who told you where to try, Otto."

A touch of excitement snapped Ches out of some irate reflections. "What made you pick on that spot, Nat? The chart here shows soft sand at fifteen feet—nothing about shell."

"Luck made him pick it," Doc said. "The devil's own luck, that's all."

"Oh," Ches said, thinking of Dan's missing logbook and Dan's care in making precise entries giving position. "I thought Nat might have read it somewhere."

Doc swore softly. "Can Nat read? Let's get the bucket down."

Ches slowly swung the boat counter-clockwise, using the engines more than the rudder, reversing the port engine enough to allow headway on the turn.

Two gulls spotted the trawling party, cried raucously, and were

joined by half a dozen more, eager for tidbits from the bottom of the sea.

The UR2 began to roll. Phyllis said, "Skip my turn, you hardy sailors." She went below to lie down.

Doc said, "We've dragged thirty minutes, Otto. Let's pull."

"Right." Otto got up on the stern, his powerful legs braced wide against the roll. Slowly, hand over hand as Ches backed up the boat, Otto pulled the cable in. "Coming up!"

Ches threw both engines out of reverse and held the boat still. For fifteen feet Otto lifted the loaded bucket direct, aided by the water. Then the more than a hundred pounds of it banged against the varnished transom, muddying and scraping the gilded letters UR2.

"Sorry, Skipper!" Otto's wide shoulders tensed. The dredge, dripping muck through the meshes of the hardware cloth, swung onto the sorting board like a sack of meal. Otto wasn't even breathing heavily.

Ches left the controls and tossed over a pail attached to a line. He pulled the pail in full. Salt water trickled down over the dredge bucket's squirming contents as Otto held the bucket upright. Two more pails of water, and Doc said, "Dump it and let me see."

Otto poured the mess onto the sorting board. "What you can't see, Boss, you can smell."

Johanna, Emily, and Nat stood watching as Doc plunged a hand in the mud and sand and pulled out a shell. "Nice lettered-olive." He dropped it into a wooden box beside him and poured a little more water on the sorting board from a beer can.

"I wouldn't put my hands in that mudpile without gloves on for a million dollars," Johanna declared.

"Why not, for heaven's sake?" Emily spread out her bare, competent fingers.

"After what you told us about that textile cone!"

"I also said to forget it. They've been shelling here for hundreds of years without gloves. Nobody's ever even seen one before."

"Nobody's ever found a *gloria-maris* before, either," Johanna reminded Emily.

"Emily's right, Jo," Doc said. "You can't sort shells with gloves on. Some of the tiniest shells are the finest. It would ruin gloves to stick them in there. Try washing out good leather."

"Maybe I'm scared," Johanna said.

"Well, I wouldn't advertise it," Nat advised her. "The tourists will be bathing with buckskin suits and boots on."

"This isn't bad." Doc picked out an apple-murex and placed the spiny little shell in the box with his lettered-olive.

They pulled three more times before Nat's turn, without much

luck. There was, of course, a lot of small fry, but unless Nat pulled a rabbit from the hat, Doc had certainly swept the morning, and most likely the whole day.

The wind had increased. Ches had his eye on some mare's-tail clouds whipping across the sky in the southwest. Dan had often told him:

"Mackerel sky and mare's-tails
Make tall ships carry low sails!"

If it blew up any stronger after Nat's haul, Ches decided he'd start to run for home. January wasn't any month to fool around with. It could produce a sudden, devastating, ice-laden squall.

The UR2 had begun to smell badly of dried mud and dead and dying shells. Added to that, fumes from the exhausts kept blowing into the cockpit when the wind was astern.

It was just as Otto dumped the dredge basket on the sorting board for Nat's turn that Johanna became ill. She ran to the rail close by the basket. Emily went to her and helped her below.

Ches called down, "There's spirits of ammonia in the medicine chest."

Behind him he heard Nat say, "Well, I'm a monkey's uncle if that isn't another Glory-of-the-Sea."

Ches turned around from the wheel just in time to see Nat greedily seize a three- or four-inch conical shell that was squirming from the muck and seaweed toward the end of the board and freedom.

"Mud and all," Ches thought, "Nat's right!" Ches had looked too long at Doc's and the one at Di Marco's ever to mistake those reticulated orange-brown lines and those three blotched bands of deep chestnut.

"By Jupiter, it is another *gloria-maris!*" Doc stared in amazement. "But if you think I'm putting out any more money for—"

His words were drowned in Nat's scream. It welled from the depths of frantic fear and unbearable pain. "Get it loose, you fools! It's killing me! Get it loose!" His scream rose louder than before, bringing the women tumbling up from the cabin, Johanna still pale.

Nat flung his arm convulsively like a baseball pitcher gone crazy, then looked down at his hand again where the creature was still wedded to his palm. "Get it loose! Get it loose! What is it?" He seized the cone with the fumbling fingers of his left hand and gave an agonizing pull. The cone came loose. Nat flung it from him overboard and slumped down into the fishing chair. He stared with tear-filled eyes at his swelling right hand and wrist, then pulled up his sleeve with panicky jerks as if dreading what he might see.

Motionless, petrified, all of them watched as the angry red swelling crept up his arm.

Nat clutched at his throat and started to whimper. With the ges-

ture of an injured child he held out his muddy palm. Almost in the center, imbedded firmly, was a three-quarter-inch barbed fang.

"Get his coat off," Ches ordered. "There's a lancet below and iodine. I'll see what I can do."

Already Nat's face was growing mottled. He mouthed some words that ended in a groan, and slumped farther forward, inching limply off the chair with the UR2's roll.

"There's nothing to do except pray." Emily held to the wheel to steady herself. "Look at that fang in his hand, Doc. He'll be dead in five minutes—like Dan."

"It's impossible, Emily," Doc said. "You saw that shell, didn't you?"

"Yes, I saw it." Emily swayed and brushed the back of her hand across her eyes. "It's a shame Nat threw it overboard. It might have sent his murderer to the electric chair."

"What do you mean, 'his murderer'?" Johanna was pale to her crimson lips. Her voice was flat and dry.

The boat rolled steeply. Nat pitched to the floor, his body seized with a sudden horrible rigor. Then he lay quiet, set like Dan in a stiff, unnatural rigidity.

"He's dead," Emily said. She looked at each one of them in turn. "We seem to have an artist among us! Still, it doesn't take much skill to stain a deadly Cloth-of-Gold to look like the harmless Glory-of-the-Sea." . . .

By night the wind had hauled around and settled into a steady, biting, northwest blow that might last for days.

Snug in the cabin of the UR2, the electric heater glowing like a miniature sun, Ches finished his coffee, stacked his few dishes in the sink, then turned on a reading light at the head of the bunk and lay down, his mind seething with wild ideas.

A few minutes later the boat rocked slightly. Ches sat up. The booby hatch opened and Phyllis came below, sliding it shut after her.

"Feels good in here." She put a brown paper hotel envelope on the table and took off her white rubber slicker. Her hair was wind-tossed, her eyes two pools in a dead-white face.

"Nat's body is at the mortician's. Doc made all the arrangements. There were some formalities about permission for an autopsy. The Coast Guard's coming over in the morning. They'll want to talk to you." She sat down beside Ches and huddled into a corner.

"Did everyone come back with you?"

"Otto, Emily, and Johanna. We missed the last ferry, but Otto paid for an extra trip. We're booming the line."

"Where's Doc?"

"Flying to New York, or Miami, tonight. Somewhere. Ches—"

"What?"

"Hold me tight in your arms a minute. I'm inhuman. I don't feel anything."

"You are tired, darling. Overwrought." He held her close, patting her slender shoulder gently. After a little her trembling stopped. Her arms stole up around his neck. She kissed him once and freed herself.

"I'll come to life again sometime. I think I really love you, Ches. Before I can show it, there are things --frightful things—we have to get out of the way. Look in there." She pointed to the envelope on the table.

He tore off the paper, fighting to stabilize fingers that were stumbling. The prints and negatives were there—the ones he'd thought were destroyed in the fire. Or duplicates, certainly.

Along with the pictures was Dan's missing logbook. Phyllis opened it to the last-entered page. Ches read half aloud the terse entry in Dan's familiar scrawl: "Dredged where the twin palms are just abaft the starboard light. No luck today, but still think Doc may be right. $12.09 groceries for Prof. Andersen. Left his films at Preston's."

"The pictures were in the logbook in Nat's safe," Phyllis said miserably. "There was twenty-five thousand in cash, too."

"Half what Doc paid him. Have you found the rest?"

"No, and it's not in the bank, either. Ches, how did Nat get that logbook?"

"He must have stolen the logbook from the boat here and throttled me when I nearly caught him. He stole the pictures from an envelope on my table three nights ago, then burned the house down to cover up his theft. Nat saw me looking at them in Preston's."

"You mean he'd burn you out just for those pictures?" Phyllis clutched the edge of the cabin table. "What makes them that important?"

"I'm trying to figure that out, darling. Whatever Nat's reason, it threw me off the track entirely. I've been convinced the house was burned to make me sell my land—that could mean either Nat or Doc Bullock burned it. Maybe even Emily. The bridge coming in would benefit them all. Now I'm beginning to think the pictures were the main thing."

"But what's that shell in the pictures?" Phyllis asked again.

"It's a *gloria-maris,*" Ches said. "I think it's a particular *gloria-maris*—the one stolen from a museum in New York. Di Marco told me about it."

"Are you convinced Dan *was* killed, Ches? Are you sure it wasn't accidental?"

Ches pushed the logbook toward her. "Dan didn't dredge up any-

thing the day he was killed. Read it right there: 'No luck today.' He'd have mentioned that textile cone if he'd pulled it up. Dan tells us something else in the logbook—where he was killed. He stopped by Andersen's on his way in here to deliver the old man's groceries. I think he was killed there and that the killer ran the UR2 in here with Dan's body on it."

"You can't believe Professor Andersen killed Dan."

"I think Andersen is dead, and that Dan walked in unexpectedly while the professor was being murdered."

Phyllis plucked at her lips. "How does Nat figure in this?"

"I think Nat's been putting the squeeze on someone."

"For what?"

"Maybe the double murder of Andersen and Dan," Ches said. "Nat certainly knew all the answers, and had the proof of murder in that logbook. I think the killer overlooked that book and Nat didn't. That's why Nat was killed today."

"What are you going to do, Ches?"

"I'd head for Andersen's right now, if I had a pistol. Mine went up in the fire. Whether I'm right or wrong, there may be shooting. There was plenty the last time we tried to land there."

Phyllis took a flat .25 caliber automatic from the pocket of her white slicker and handed it to Ches. "This is Nat's," she said. "It didn't do him much good. Maybe it will help you and me. Wherever you go, I'm going with you." . . .

Ches didn't know how long he'd been rowing. The usually calm surface of Marlin Bay was in one of its most vicious moods, and every mechanical stroke of the oars pushed the rowboat into a roller that covered his back and neck with an icy spray. He could hear the stinging drops slap against Phyllis's white raincoat. She must be taking it worse than he was, sitting hunched against the wind in the stern.

He rowed past Andersen's dock in the black void, until the flash of the lighthouse on Star Point told him he had gone too far. Through the rift in the trees Ches could see that a light was on in Andersen's workroom—the same light he and the kid had seen on the first trip to the island. Ches rested on the oars and let the wind blow the boat back in along the shore until it struck the pilings of the docks.

With his mouth close to Phyllis's ear, Ches said, "Stay in the boat, ready to cast off, until I come and get you." He was up on the dock before she could answer. His boat shoes clung soundlessly to the wet planking as he walked toward the porch, guiding himself on the narrow slip entirely by feel.

Not a glimmer of light showed in the back of the house that overlooked Marlin Bay. At the land end

of the dock a door in the enclosed porch barred his way. He tried it cautiously. It opened. Holding to the automatic in his jacket pocket, he stepped inside and closed the door behind him.

Wind was whistling through the slitted metal shutters at the north end of the porch. The noise rose and fell mournfully, as a giant might play a dirge on a mammoth comb.

Ches was aware of a cluttered floor and rough workbenches built around the sides of the porch. Smells struck at him: varnish and stain; an overtone of acids and formaldehyde; a lingering touch of musk, seaweed, and dried mud, like low tide in the bay.

He took from his pocket the small flash he had brought and risked a brief gleam against his palm.

Another door, straight ahead, led inside. It, too, was unlocked, and a minute later he was standing inside the big main room. The room was warm and humid. There was a gurgle all around him now, but soft and subdued, as though it were really part of the silence. He stood a while, rigid, trying to identify the sound, and sniffing at a strong smell of the ocean that permeated the room.

At last he risked the flash again. The walls were lined in every available space with glass-fronted tanks housing sea plants and fish that were tiny flashes of color. Water ran continuously through the tanks, accounting for the gurgle.

There were closed double sliding doors ahead, and another single closed door to Ches's left at the north end of the room. Ches switched off his flashlight and started for the single door. Three steps toward it and he stopped. The skin on his neck and chest was itching and stinging with a sudden prickling sensation of fear.

He knew the layout of the old clubhouse from years back. That door to his left led into the room that could be seen from north of Harbor Point, but not from the dock where Phyllis was waiting. Fifteen minutes before, there had been a light on in that room. He and Phyllis had both seen it from the rowboat. Now, no light showed under that door. He took two more indecisive steps toward it, then froze as a cluster of ceiling lights came on.

Ches whirled, and found himself facing Emily Wininger. She had come in soundlessly through the sliding doors and was holding a shotgun pointed at his stomach.

They stared at each other, while Ches's stomach fluttered, then Emily lowered the muzzle toward the floor. "We both seem to have had the same idea," she said.

"What?"

"That the answer lay here."

"That's what you thought the other night."

"Yes, but somebody outthought

us. Tonight you and I both got in —I climbed the fence outside. Took a chance that the electricity wasn't on." She took a quick pace and turned off the lights. "Are you alone?"

"Phyllis is out in the rowboat."

"Get her," Emily said quickly. "We can drive back up to my house in my car. I'm going to turn the light back on in the professor's office." Her voice trembled. "I hope nobody's watching all these lights turning on and off. Our lives won't be worth a dime."

Ches couldn't help asking. "How did you hear me come in?"

"I didn't," Emily said. "My nerves are shot. I felt the draft when you opened the door. I don't know how to shoot a shotgun." She motioned toward the door to the porch. "Get Phyllis. Hurry. Leave the boat. Anything, but let's get out of this slaughterhouse."

Ches brought Phyllis to the house, leaving the rowboat tied to the dock, to sink if it wanted to. In single file, staying close to Emily in the lead, they went through another room, down a darkened hall, and out into a patio.

The light that Emily had turned on in Andersen's office shone feebly through a yellow shade, glinting faintly on a foot-high wire fence erected around the swimming pool.

As they walked swiftly along the path by the pool toward the gate in the fence, the odor of musk Ches had smelled on the porch struck sickeningly in his nostrils. Suddenly they heard a hiss, prolonged and shocking. Phyllis seized his arm and gave a muffled scream.

Before Emily could speak, Ches had switched on his flashlight and turned the ray on the surface of the swimming pool two feet below him. Six eyes lit up, glowing at him impersonally like drops of scarlet blood, icing his veins with an instant of freezing terror. Three ugly pointed snouts sank below the surface of the pool without leaving so much as a ripple.

"Crocodiles," Emily said in a voice tinged with hysteria. "Seventeen of them in there. If we fell in there right now there wouldn't be a trace of any of us in twenty-four hours. Not one trace. They digest anything—teeth, clothes, bones, shoes. In four days, with water being pumped through that pool, not even a bloodstain would remain." She started to run for the gate, sobbing chokingly, and flung back over her shoulder, "I said let's get out of this slaughterhouse, but you had to stop and look. Now you know where Professor Adolph Andersen has gone!" . . .

"Not a light," Ches thought as Emily's car bounced over the rough shell road and rattled over the narrow, rickety bridges that seemed to be endless between Harbor Point and the highway. "Not a house, nor a soul to be seen. No sound except the howling wind." He put an arm around Phyllis, trembling beside

him, and pulled her closer, grateful for the human contact.

Emily was talking as though she were dazed and bewildered; telling things she didn't want to believe, herself; letting her words drop out slowly in the temporary security of her own car.

"The cones," she said. "The textile cones—in case I'm dead by morning it's better you and Phyllis know. The professor had four—they were labeled in their own aquarium—'*Conus-textile*. Deadly. 4.' All four are gone."

"Do you think the professor was killed with a cone?" Ches asked.

"No, I don't." Emily sounded numb. She slowed down the car. "Our murderer isn't wasteful. He's neat and clever. He's an artist, but he thinks fast. He wouldn't waste a textile cone. A blow on the head and a push into the pool—nothing to it."

"Then, if one cone killed Dan and one killed Nat—"

"It means two more are hidden somewhere," Emily finished for Ches. "Two more cones to finish two more people. If that becomes necessary, it will make five people killed for Doc's fifty thousand dollars."

"I don't understand," Phyllis said. "What has Doc's fifty thousand to do with the professor, Dan, and Nat being killed, Emily?"

"It's all right here in German." Emily patted her pocket. "I was a fool and so was Doc to ever think a Glory-of-the-Sea would be dredged up here. Whoever killed Professor Andersen couldn't read German, or this part of Andersen's manuscript would never have been left around. Professor Andersen was experimenting with *Pagurus pollicaris*—that's the ordinary hermit crab. The hermit crab will occupy the empty shells of almost any other species, and use that shell for a home until the crab outgrows it. Then it will move to a larger one. While a crab's inside, even a conchologist as good as Doc couldn't tell, if he saw it in the mud, that it wasn't a living shell."

They passed Preston's store, dark and closed tight for the night. A cold, driving rain had moved in over San Carlos Bay. On the highway Emily pulled to one side, parked in the trees, and switched off the car lights.

"I'm frightened," she said. "Frightened of what I'm going to tell you. There is one other person on this island who knows what I know. That person sold Professor Andersen a *gloria-maris* about six months ago. The professor paid five thousand for it. I have the canceled check here. I found it tonight before you came."

"And you think that's the same Glory-of-the-Sea that was stolen from the museum?" Ches asked her.

"How did you know about that?"

Ches told her about his talk with Gino Di Marco. He took out the

pictures Phyllis had found in Nat's safe and held them under the flashlight.

Emily studied them closely, breathing quickly. "I could check these with specifications I have at the house, but there's no use. I'm convinced this is the stolen *gloria-maris*. I don't believe Professor Andersen had any idea it was stolen when he bought it. I think he got an idea from the talk I had with him a few weeks ago. Shortly after that, Doc Bullock arrived here and made public his offer of fifty thousand dollars. Ches, that Glory-of-the-Sea that Nat dredged up and sold to Doc is the same shell—"

"But that *gloria-maris* Doc bought was alive," Ches protested.

"It was dead," Emily said firmly. "Just as dead as the professor, who was killed because of it. Doc's Glory-of-the-Sea is a hundred years old. The professor had induced a hermit crab to take up residence in it. Andersen tells about it in his manuscript. The killer must have seen that *gloria-maris* walking around in a tank by itself and gotten his big idea. It would take a close inspection to tell it wasn't a live shell, and it was covered with mud when Doc saw it crawling. A hermit crab sticks close in its temporary home. He walks around with his house on his back. I think the killer tried to buy it back again to swindle Doc, or maybe he just mentioned it to Andersen. The old man might have gotten mad and said he'd made pictures of it to prove that it was the museum's shell, and that he intended to expose the crook."

"Nat knew all the answers," Ches said. "He sold his life for twenty-five thousand. Half the money Doc paid. Phyllis found it in Nat's safe tonight. If we only knew who got the other half." Ches paused. "Otto *could* read German, couldn't he?"

"I don't know." Emily sat up stiffly back of the wheel. "Lots of people speak a language but can't read it."

"Johanna can't speak German," Phyllis put in. "If she'd wanted to get money by selling that *gloria-maris* to Doc, she couldn't have done it by herself. She'd have had to cut Nat in."

"Johanna," Emily repeated dully. "That's strange. I've been concentrating on Otto. What brought Johanna into your mind?"

"Gloves," Phyllis said. "Whoever planted that painted cone in the dredge bucket today had to have gloves on. That seems to let everyone out but Johanna and Otto."

"That's true," Emily said. "It's horrible, too. Ches, what are we going to do?"

"Find those two missing cones," Ches said. "If they're alive they must be on board the Mirage. Then I'll start on Johanna and Otto."

"Doing what?"

"The only thing I can do," Ches

said. "Playing them one against the other."

Emily dropped Ches and Phyllis at the docks and drove off through the driving rain. Only two cars were in the parking space, Dan's and Phyllis's. After a short consideration, Ches decided to hide both cars. He drove Dan's car through high grass and weeds to a place where it couldn't be seen from the Mirage or the UR2. Phyllis took her car back up the shell road and left it concealed in a thicket. She was back in a few minutes, dripping rain from her waterproof.

"Get in the cockpit of the UR2 where it's drier," Ches told her. "If a car drives in, give a blast on the electric horn. I'm going to search the Mirage."

He went down the dock, got aboard the Mirage, and stood in the spacious cockpit listening. The Mirage tugged gently at her lines, rubbing at her side fenders, scarcely aware of the briskness of the northwest blow.

He snapped on the flashlight, and the gleam sparkled on a big, oval tank of glass occupying the center of the cockpit. An aerator was sending up bubbles from the bottom, supplying the shells and fish with oxygen and producing the same gurgle he had heard in Anderson's, only much less in volume.

A flip switch was set in one of the four supporting stanchions. Ches pushed it up to ON. Vapor lights concealed inside the bottom of the tank came on, filling the aquarium with an eerie, unearthly glow. Coral and rock formed a centerpiece set in a bed of mud and sand. Seaweed and sea lettuce made a forest for tiny bright fish.

It was beautiful, but he knew he'd pulled a blank. He could see no cones, and if they'd been in there no one could get one out in a hurry.

The top of the aquarium was more than half covered with Janthina, one of the strangest snails in the sea. The small, purple shells were floating around beneath the surface, each attached to its own private raft about two inches in diameter. The rafts were made of a mass of air bubbles of hardened mucous, secreted by the foot of the snail. Ches had captured many Janthina as a boy. Touch just one of those purple snails and it exudes a deep, almost indelible magenta dye, a stain that nothing ever seems to remove entirely.

He was thinking about that indelible dye as he switched off the lights in the aquarium and let his torch flit about the cockpit again. It fell on the swivel fishing chairs, then moved on to the transom seat with its copper-lined fishwell underneath. The Mirage had rods, outriggers, and a fishwell. But the fishwell was never used, because the Mirage never went out fishing.

A ring was set flush in the transom seat. Ches pried it up, opened the hatch, and pointed his light

down into the shallow water. There were bubbles from an aerator in there, too. He held his hand down close to the water, and realized then that it, too, was heated.

The seldom-used fishwell had been converted into an auxiliary tank for tropical shells. *Ulva latissima,* the sea lettuce used so much in aquariums, covered the bottom.

Ches jerked down a long-handled landing net from clips above the aquarium, thrust it in the fishwell, and slowly moved the lettuce aside.

The torch lit up two more of the lethal Cloth-of-Gold huddled in a corner. He scooped them out with the landing net, and shouted to Phyllis. She came running down the dock, ghostly in her flapping slicker. "You found them?"

"Two. In the fishwell under the seat."

"What are you going to do?"

"Boil them and put them back again—if we have time. Whoever's been fooling around with these has had to handle them without this net. I don't think you can use a net to take one from your pocket. If he or she will only stick a gloved hand in there just one more time—" Ches smiled grimly. "I'm setting a little booby trap with Janthina. Moving some from the aquarium into the fishwell. Our killer is the only one who knows the cones are there!" . . .

Ches and Phyllis had been sitting in the dark on board the UR2 for half an hour when Otto and Johanna came down. Headlights went out on the station wagon. Otto's heavy footsteps, accompanied by Johanna's lighter ones, went by the stern, unexcited and unhurried. No more than a visit to the yacht for a nightcap or a cup of coffee.

Ches and Phyllis sat and waited. Five minutes. Ten. He tried to decide what to do.

Then it was decided for him. He heard Johanna scream. It was short, sharp, curdling his blood as it traveled out against the wind and bounced back from the bay, then stopped abruptly.

Ches was up on deck in a single bound. Phyllis started up after him. He pushed her back. "Don't move out of here unless I call."

Ches covered the steps between the boats on silent flying feet, Nat's .25 automatic in his hand. He jumped aboard the roomy cockpit and almost stepped on Johanna, as he had almost stepped on Dan four nights before on the UR2.

Lights came up in the aquarium, flickering fantastically against Johanna's bright-red zipper jacket. She lay on her back, her black hair flung out wildly. Her right hand was clutched tight on a textile cone.

Otto was kneeling beside her. His gray eyes, thoughtful and flinty, were fixed on Ches over the sights of a heavy automatic pistol. "Drop the popgun, Ches!" The muzzle of

the automatic wavered enough to indicate the gun in Ches's hand.

Ches relaxed his fingers. The gun slid to the deck beside Johanna.

"Now come inside and sit down," Otto said. He shoved the automatic into his belt, the butt protruding handily. "I don't intend to shoot you, Ches, but I will if you start anything and refuse to listen to what I have to say."

"I'm listening," Ches said as he preceded Otto inside. He knew too well that his life depended on listening, being casual, and keeping his eyes away from the magenta Janthina stains on Otto's brawny right forearm.

"Well, be a good boy and don't get things wrong." Otto motioned Ches to a chair and took one facing him. Otto's back was toward the cabin door. The ship's clock struck four bells—ten o'clock. Ches looked up at it over Otto's head and figured swiftly that without some breaks his chances of hearing it strike half-past-ten were rather dim.

"Johanna was a tramp," Otto said. He lit a cigar, his eyes never leaving Ches. "I've tried to tell the boss that all along, or at least make him see it. She was dumb, but he was worse. She gambled on everything—cards, races—and lost on them all. I had sort of a yen for her. Then she took up a little hoop-rolling with Nat Lawson. I washed my hands of it all. When I refused to help her any more she took up thievery. Do you know what she stole?"

"I know nothing about it."

Otto chuckled softly. "Maybe she wasn't so dumb, at that. She robbed a museum of its Glory-of-the-Sea. She sold it to Professor Andersen, and lost the money at the races in Miami. I was with her, but I didn't know until tonight where she got all that dough."

"You mean Johanna confessed all this?" There was a hypnotic quality about those magenta stains that kept dragging Ches's gaze back to Otto's arm.

"At the house tonight"—Otto took a long puff and put his cigar down—"I'll admit I had to put some pressure on. She got another scheme, a dilly, when Doc offered fifty thousand for the first live Glory-of-the-Sea to be found here. Old Andersen had put a hermit crab in the *gloria-maris* shell. Brought it to life right under her nose. She thought the old goat had fallen for her. She thought that about every man. Anyhow, she tried to talk Andersen out of the shell by telling him it was stolen. There was a fracas as she was leaving. She conked the old man and pushed him into his crocodile pool."

Ches found he wanted a cigarette badly but decided against it.

"Here's where everything went haywire for her." Otto shifted his weight. "She had rowed to Andersen's in Nat's boat. Just as she came out, after pushing the old man in

the pool, Dan pulled into the dock bringing groceries. Johanna had to think fast. She jumped into the UR2 and started talking. Then she conked Dan with that club he used to stun tarpon and kingfish."

Ches looked up at the clock again. Ten minutes had passed. It seemed like an hour or more. Water lapped against the Mirage, and the windows were splashed with rain.

"It was Dan or her," Otto said. "Old Man Andersen had four of those textile cones in a tank. Johanna took them aboard the UR2 in a bucket. While Dan was still out cold, she shoved one in his hand."

Ches fought a wild desire to yell, "Like you did to Johanna just now!" Instead, he said quite calmly, "I might understand her killing Dan if she were trapped, but why did she have to murder Nat, too?"

Otto shrugged. "Nat was broke, and a blackmailer to boot. She used his rowboat to go to Andersen's. Personally, I think they'd cooked up selling that *gloria-maris* to Doc together. She had to have someone. Doc wasn't paying any fifty grand to her. I think Nat was waiting at the dock when Johanna brought the UR2 in with Dan's body on board. Then he had her for murder. He got further proof from Dan's logbook, I think. I'm certain he's the one who choked you. Anyhow, Johanna must have made another trip back to Andersen's and used the old man's stains to disguise that textile-cone as a *gloria-maris*. Nat was greedy. He fell for that one fast, as you know."

"It's all very clear, except what happened on board here tonight," Ches said.

"After she'd spilled all this, I brought her down here to call the Coast Guard, and she tried to kill me. If I were dead, this whole mess could be blamed on me. She started to cry, and ran out into the cockpit. I waited a minute and followed her. She was reaching into the fishwell under the transom seat. I hit her, Ches, but I wasn't in time. She had those other cones in there. It might have been suicide, or maybe she was just too excited to realize she didn't have her gloves on. She came out with a textile cone in her bare hand. You must have heard her scream."

"Yes, I heard her." Ches took a deep breath. Johanna was standing in the cabin door, Nat's .25 which Ches had dropped beside her held in her hand. "Johanna must have screamed just before you smashed her over the head with your gun." Ches stood up. "Where did you get the tattoo marks, Otto?" Ches pointed to the magenta spots.

Otto got up, stretching out his arm and revolving it slowly to examine each side. His eyes narrowed. "What sort of a trick is this? Those spots have never been on my arm before."

"Only since you reached in the fishwell to get the cone you put in

Johanna's hand," Ches told him. "Those spots are dye from Janthina snails. I put them in the fishwell about an hour ago. They'll still be on your arm, Otto, when they strap you in the electric chair. Johanna's got Nat's gun covering you, Otto. She's standing right behind you in the cabin door."

"Johanna's dead," Otto didn't turn to the doorway. "I've been taken in by cheap tricks before!"

He jerked the gun up. As he raised it toward Ches, Johanna fired. Otto stared amazed at his mangled fingers as the automatic was knocked from his hand to the floor. He looked reproachfully from Ches to Johanna.

"That was quite a confession," Ches said. "Where you mentioned Johanna we can just fill your name in, and we have the true story."

"She should be dead," Otto said. "What happened to that textile cone?"

"I boiled it. Boiled them both, as a matter of fact. You were the one who showed me how." . . .

It was nearly one when a Coast Guard boat pulled in beside the Mirage in answer to a call from Ches on the ship-to-shore phone. Doc Bullock came with it. Doc had appeared before the U. S. Commissioner in Miami during the afternoon and signed a complaint against Otto. The charge was murder on the high seas. He had flown back with a warrant for Otto's arrest and arrived at the Coast Guard station just as the boat was putting out for Crescent.

Otto had refused to speak after finding Johanna was still alive.

"It's ironical that only people you trust can really betray you," Doc said after the Coast Guard officers had taken Otto away. "I refused to believe rumors I'd heard about Otto losing large sums gambling. I woke up suddenly today when Nat was killed. I realized that Otto and Jo were the only ones wearing gloves on the UR2, the only ones who could have planted that textile cone. I did some checking in Miami, by long-distance phone, and found out that I'd bought a *gloria-maris* stolen from the Museum of Natural History. The specifications of mine checked exactly."

Ches said, "Emily Wininger figured that out, too."

Doc's jaw set. "I've just been gypped, Ches, but an irreparable wrong has been done to you through my stupidity. I'm further in your debt for saving Johanna. There isn't money enough in the world to pay you, but if you ever need any you might try asking me."

"I'll settle for the thirty thousand for my land," Ches said. "Phyllis has convinced me we need a bridge here, and I've sold myself on the idea that a few good cops are nice to have around."

Phyllis said, "I hope I've convinced him we're getting married in June."

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